What we found in the green sphere by TheLonesomeWriter

Series: The Halfa family [2]
Category: Danny Phantom
Genre: Angst, Cannibalism, F/F, F/M, Family Drama, Gladiators, Gore and Blood, M/M, Sorry Not Sorry, Swearing, Sweet Substitution, Violence, Vlad is still an asshole, alternative universe, amethyst ocean, badger cereal, but he's doing better at the end, get ready for badger cereal, halfa family verses the Fentons, i have to much fun hurting him and everyone else, meddling minutes, poor Danny can't decide, the heavy plot continues, to many tags as usual
Characters: Clockwork (Danny Phantom), Dan Phantom, Danielle "Dani" Phantom, Danny Fenton, Jack Fenton, Jazz Fenton, Maddie Fenton, Most ghosts from Danny Phantom, My own OC, Sam Manson, Supernatural Creatures - Character, Tucker Foley, Valerie Gray, Vlad Masters
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Summary:

Its been two months since Vlad kidnapped Arianna and left Danny in the dark of her whereabouts or the man's hiding spot.
Together with his sister, friends and newly returned cousin, Dani Phantom, Danny sets out to find and rescue the female halfa once again and this time Vlad will be sorry.
But things aren't always what they seems and some things change over time.

- time, which none of the halfas has on their side and as the clock ticks, the storm that's bound to roll over them, moves closer and threats to change everything forever.
But time is something that's always beneficial for its keeper and while Vlad Masters and the Cube schemes, Clockwork has his own game for them to play a part in and observe with his new partner in time, Dan Phantom.

Relationships: Clockwork/Dan Phantom, Danny Fenton & Vlad Masters, Danny Fenton/Sam Manson, Dorathea "Dora"/Tucker Foley, Valerie Gray/Danielle "Dani" Phantom
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Chapter 1

Author's Note:

- For Cait.

> Hey people - I know I promised to post yesterday, but apparently ao3 deletes works if you're not fast enough to post them and deleted my work. luckily i still had it in Word and can post again, but dang!
> hope you like it and haven't abandoned this silly story just yet
> love ya!

The destroyed living room held a sharp stench of ozone and only the sound of Daniel's shallow breathing filled the silence after the duplicates had left with the stretcher.

The puddles and hand marks of mixed blood and ectoplasm was still fresh on the burned floor and held a sharp smell of dead and sickness. The last trace of Arianna, before Vlad's duplicates had phased her out of the house and out of the youngest male ghost-hybrids life.

"You killed her…" The boy whispered accusing and gritted his teeth, in a mix of anger and unbelieve.

Vlad who was standing beside him and adjusting his suit after transforming back to human form. scoffed by that silly conclusion and forced himself to remember that the boy was what he was after all.

Just a boy.

"She will need all my medical expertise, but with time and care she will live," he ensured as calmly as possible and straightened his tie a bit. He exhaled now that the hardest part of his long plan was behind him and nodded to himself.

The situation had almost gotten out of hand.

Of course, he had expected Miss. Vølver to reject his offer of medical assistance, due to Daniel's resentment towards him and Vlad would had been an idiot to expect the boy to held his tongue and cooperate, but it wasn't forbidden to hope for more civil methods.

This mess that once had been the Fenton's living room was clearly not a sign of civility, if the burned walls and blood specked concrete floor was anything to go by.

She sure had put up a quite fight with him, but as expected, sending her back into her human form by removing her bracelet and thereby her last resistance to falling back into her sick human form, had left her weak enough for him to capture.

Capturing the halfa by forcing her back into human form was his last plan – out of many – but what could you do? He had won and he should be satisfied.

He was.

"She will live, Daniel."

"So you can use her?" Daniel asked, voice dripping with spite, "so she can be in another prison for the rest of her life? I think she would choose death over that."

Vlad could only return the boy's hatred with a sympathetic smile. Daniel had a lot to learn and he would teach him in due time, when he accepted the changes to come.

"She will be fine, little badger," he reassured with a light chuckle and patted Danny shoulder as a sign of goodwill.

A hand was lashed out after him, but everyone could see that the boy had no will to fight him. He seemed caught in his sorrows and forced human form, still two hours or more from putting the Plasmius-maximus core suppressing effect behind him.

The boy didn't even look up when Vlad teleport out of the house and out on the street. He hated to see Daniel this way, but it was a necessity. He ended up a few blocks from Fenton Works where a large van held idle, waiting for him.

One of his duplicates took the driver's seat and he closed the tailgate to join his working duplicates in the back. They were all bent over the stretcher, where the female halfa now laid unconscious and was hooked up to a heart machine and two hoses that would keep her lungs functioning.

Vlad didn’t like the idea of cutting her throat for them to enter her lounges and phased them into her body instead.

They all work in deep silent concentration to keep all her bodily functions running while the vehicle drove towards the airport, where his private jet awaited them.

He had considered teleport them, but it would be too risky with all the fragile machinery and she was in no condition to cope with such a maneuver, without it worsen her already critical situation.

One of the duplicates worked intensively on removing blood and ectoplasm from her lungs, while another gave her a blood transfusion and attached several new IVs to her arms. Vlad concluded that she was now in full coma and removed the oxygen mask.

They drove her carefully into the plane and secured her with blankets and machines, while Vlad's private pilot started the engines. The man hadn’t as much as raised an eyebrow at the sight of the many duplicates that came flying with a stretcher and had just accepted his orders with a grin.

Vlad had long ago abandoned all ideas about keeping human workers and had hired a small group of ghosts instead. The pilot was original hired when he had needed Daniel and his mother transported to his mountain chalet and he hadn’t seen any reason to fire him afterwards.

The ghost had been a pilot during the war and could fly just anything it seemed. Vlad liked to keep him as a simple pilot and private driver though.

Vlad undertook to stand guard over his patient during the entire trip back to Wisconsin and observed the unconscious woman with his elbows resting on his knees and eyebrows convulsed in thought. He

had planned this down to the smallest detail and considered all risks by moving her like this.

He had already known from the start that a collision would be inevitable. She had escaped a captivity and wouldn't want to go to another freely, no matter what he said. The boy had done a beautiful job of keeping Vlad's identity secret from her tough.

Seems Daniel could be biddable after all.

It gave Vlad the best criteria to observe her and find her weaknesses, without her returning the favor and be preparing herself for their meeting. He knew that the boy would try to resist and had made his preparations, but it all still nagged the ghost hybrid.

Threatening the boy with a gun and shooting the bracelet of her, had been his last opportunity. If he could have chosen, he would have preferred to bring her to his laboratory and remove the bracelet there, making sure he wouldn't risk moving her in this critical state in a coma.

As she was now, it was only the machines and her healing powers that kept her alive.

The two blood and ectoplasm samples he had taken on the cruise ship, had shown him that she was only one stage away from poison herself with putrefaction and if his calculations otherwise held true, her heart would have given up in less than a month.

If she had tried to return to her homeland in that condition, she would have risked having a heart attack above the North Atlantic Ocean and crash into the sea. It was only because of the agreement with Daniel about leaving them be for a year, he had remained in the background and resisted securing her immediately.

Her growing relationship and link to the boy had depended on it anyway.

One of his duplicate made a syringe ready and hit lightly on it with a flick to get the last air bubbles out of the needle. Vlad watched as the green formula was shot into the IV and followed it with his eyes as it

ran down through the line and ended in the needle in her arm.

The serum was a strong concentration of pure ectoplasm he had made back at his lab and a collection of small blood stream nanobots in the mix, which would go in and force her powers to heal her organ muscles with double effect.

The contraction of the lungs and the heart was evident right now and the sooner they could operate without assistance again, the better. When they were an hour from landing, he could conclude that the lungs now worked independently again and they removed the two tubes and replaced them with an oxygen mask.

The two large machines were unhooked as they landed and the stretcher and its patient was shielded by a screen, to keep out the rising sun as they drove it out of the plane. They switched to a helicopter and flew the last stretch before they landed on a private landing lane and Vlad led the stretcher out using a protective screen again.

The sun was about to rise over the skyscrapers and the bright light could disturb her.

The team of duplicates phased the stretcher the last way and placed it into the middle of the secret laboratory. Vlad observed his team of duplicates while the patient's old rags were cut of her with scissors and her hair and skin were cleaned gently with a small showerhead.

Dirt, blood, and ectoplasm laid in large flakes over her battered skin, but her healing powers were already closing the small scratches and wounds. It pleased Vlad, the serum had embarked.

The large glass cylinder in the middle of the lab was tipped with a mechanism and opened with a hiss, as the compacted oxygen was released. They placed her in its interior and Vlad secured that the mask and the IVs attached in her arm worked as they should and closed the cylinder.

Gel-like ectoplasm flowed into the closed container and filled the glass cylinder to the brink. Vlad had worked in absolute darkness to shield her as much as possible and blinked as the lab was lighted in a

soft green light from the tank's liquor.

The cylinder slowly straightened into a standing position and connected with the machine retainers with a hiss. Vlad stepped back and observed his work. Arianna floated unconscious and upright in the clear concentrated ectoplasm and breathed softly through her oxygen mask.

The lines of IV flowed quietly around her arm and fed her body with vitamins, medicine, and blood. The heart-machine beeped softly in a steady rhythm.

She was stable.

A duplicate gave him the infamous red shoulder bag, Skulker had collected together with the hybrid's shade and he pursed his lips. She had been eager to receive it and the bag seemed to contain all her most beloved earthly belongings.

She would probably prove more biddable if he returned it to her when she woke up.

"Place it in my safe," he said and smirked at the little keychain hanging from the bag. The little Danny Phantom figure shone dull in the green light.

How *quaint.*

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Vlad spent the next few weeks observing the tank. He expected that Daniel and his little friends would attempt a rescue, no matter how absurd an affair that would be and pulled both Skulker and The Fright Knight aside.

He explained to them quietly, but definitely, how they were to prevent Danny Phantom from leaving his territory at any cost. Attack him, exhaust him – just make sure that the boy was too busy fighting them to do anything else.

They were to continue this for as long as possible and Vlad promised to pay them handsomely. None of them had any actual objections,

besides Skulker who believed that attacking a ghost territory without intentions of overtake the said territory, would be against the few rules he as a ghost actually followed.

"Then attacking it on my behalf. If taking the boy's territory is necessary for you to fight him om my behalf, then so be it. Let's just say I want the boy's territory and I expect you to conquer it for me," Vlad had scuffed dismissively.

He couldn't take care of ghost customary right now and sent them on their merry way. He returned to his office and printed a statement to Amity Park's mayor's office, that he would be busy the next couple of months with his companies and all responsibilities would go to the vice-mayor.

With that in place, he left a duplicate to his office back at DALV and returned to his laboratory.

Arianna's healing progressed with satisfying results and she had regained some of her natural fullness over the next weeks. As she looked now, she could easily go for one of those anorexic models Vlad had been forced to associate with at various events and higher social parties.

He had never enjoyed watching women cause such injury on themselves and pulled forth his laptop to compose an obesogenic meal plan for his patient, as soon as she was ready to obtain solid food again.

Now that she was under his supervision and clinical control, Vlad took the weel earned liberty to examine her ectoplasm for other than just the interest of health results. The study came back with more results than he had expected and he sat down to study them closely.

Her ecto-DNA matched his own and Daniel's DNA types and mutagenic changes as he had expected. The main difference between the two male hybrids, however, had been their mutagenic development.

Daniel had gotten his DNA-code changed in one single powerful radiation and as data on this paper, the boy's DNA flourished in the

midst of Vlad and Arianna's, as the one with the most successful hybrid mutants of all the known halfas.

Vlad's transformation from human to hybrid, had taken years, as his body had tried to excrete the ectoplasmic radiation and ruined his immune system in the process with the so-called ecto-acne.

The many internal bleedings and mutation of the body's natural functions, had forced him into a temporary coma and taken years to return from. Vlad had later sat down to study what had led their prototype portal to produce the small explosion in his face and discovered the high content of burned diet-cola that had been mixed with the portal system.

Thanks to Daniel and his time-tampering and Clockworks kind presentation of the boys many misadventures those few years ago, Vlad now knew that it had been none other than Jack Fenton, who had mixed his soft drink into the machinery instead of ecto-purifier and even activated the portal while it was unstable.

Vlad really didn't know what he had expected.

Honestly.

The big oaf had only made the damage worse when he emptied his functioning portals ecto-filter in Vlad's face back when they had fought in the Fenton basement and provoked a new round of ecto-acne.

But it wasn't important right now.

Vlad had years back gotten his own DNA under control with sessions of pure concentrated ectoplasm shot directly into his bloodstream and after three years, his DNA had turned as stable as Daniels.

When he'd first heard about the unknown hybrid from Skulker, his first speculation hadn't been about who she was, but how she had come to be. It had taken months to find Nightshade's real identity, since no ghosts seemed to be interested in questioning her about it or learn who she had been before her half-ghost status.

Vlad had found that she had appeared in the ghost zone, at the same

course of time as millions of other human women had disappearing around the globe, which meant he would have to change his search to get results.

Throughout Skulker he had months after gained access to a bloody bandage the woman had used after a fight in the arena and Vlad had examined the DNA from the evidence in the FBI's search machine.

It had matched the blood of a crime scene of a missing Dane. A closed case in which a young woman had vanished mysteriously with no trace or motive. Vlad had almost felt utterly foolish when he had first examined the papers about the crime scene.

Besides a small amount of blood and other loose evidence, the police had scraped a broken machinery together. The Wisconsin ghost portal project.

Vlad should have guess from the first moment, that if the same man’s idiocy could create two hybrids, it would be the case with the third as well.

However, what had baffled Vlad, had been the fact that this hybrid didn’t suffer the same anguish as himself, despite being turned by the same small unfinished portal. Her ectoplasm had proved her to be a perfectly viable halfa with a stable DNA and ghostly bodily functions, an instant transformation closer to Daniel’s than his own.

Through a corrupt depot manager, Vlad had gotten the broken portal brought to his home from the FBI's storage and examined it to find the underlying cause of this mystery.

At the end, he had to conclude the woman was lucky to be alive. According to Vlad's computations, the portal had burned all of the sugar and the extraneous matter, when Vlad had been irradiated.

The dose of ecto-energy that had transformed Arianna's DNA, had been mostly clean and just enough to complete a mutation with help of some magnifying glass, someone had placed inside the old portals portal ring as an improvement.

She could live without the concentrated ectoplasmic subsidies that

Vlad himself had applied himself over time, but Vlad wouldn't take any chances and watched as the machine shot the green liquid into her IV.

Her condition was still critical, but he was in no doubt that she would reach the second stable state within the schedule he had calculated. Her body would be cured, if not improved in a few months. With her body under control, he could begin to look at her mind.

He had plans for her and Vlad's plans were always bulletproof.

"Well mostly," he chuckled to himself and moved around the tank. Came to a halt in front of her and placed a hand on the glass.

"I have been in a coma myself once," he explained calmly, "and I am aware you can hear me, my dear. Maybe not clearly and in the right context, but I know you can understand what I am saying."

Being in a coma was very different than most realized. Vlad remembered how he had heard every word of what the doctors and the visitors had said to him and around him, but his brain had often reversed them, making them fit into his dream world and not the reality.

Vlad, for his part, had been sure that he had held long conversations with several doctors and even had participated in dialog. When they had washed him, he had dream of swimming in a lake and when the nurse had opened a window or placed ice packs around his feet and hands, Vlad had found himself in Antarctica and enjoyed the view.

All of this was vision his brain had spun out of the memory and the imagination, but it didn't change the fact that it had all seemed real to him and he had heard every word. He knew that she could to.

He was intending to use it to his advantage.

"Let me introduce myself again. I am Vlad Masters or Plasmius if you prefer. I've been observing you for some time now and wanted to meet you in person. As you must understand, we are not so different you and I…"

Vlad spent the next weeks taking care of the tank and its contents. He

would spend endless hours talking with her about various topics and even a little about himself.

Vlad had always loathed therapy, but actually found it very reassuring to confide in her silent listening and found himself open up about things he had never told anyone before.

He watched patiently as her skin regained its warm dark glow and the body became full bodied and soft, as she had been in her ghost glamor. Despite the now conferred ten years to her glamor form, the girl had not aged one day since she was turned half-ghost in her twenties and looked perfect herself, as she had been when he had watched her disguised in her glamor on the screens.

And yet.

The skin and hair color had changed one or two tones, small scars and freckles had marked the skin. Vlad knew from her tests that she would need optical lenses in her human form and had prepared a pair of glasses and contact-lenses.

He didn't know what she preferred and would be covered on both parts when she woke up.

He had left a duplicate in the headquarters of his office and left only the tank in order to sleep, eat or watch Fenton Works on his screens to make sure that the boy was occupied.

Skulker and the Fright Knight had followed his orders strictly and Vlad could watch as the boy's small rescue meeting with his friends were postponed or ruined by ghost attacks.

Daniel was forced to duplicate just to cope with both ghost fights and school again, if not his social life. The boy was so exhausted that he often fell asleep with all his clothes on and hung over his breakfast in the morning.

Breakfast which he made by himself now, Vlad noticed.

Without Arianna's loving hand to keep the house in awe an order, it disintegrated back to its former state, where the food was quick takeout and the household chores were mixed up with Jack and

Maddie scattering ghost projects.

Vlad sighed by the pity sight and left the screens to themselves and returned to his laboratory to watch over hos patient. He grabbed the papers of her latest heartrate results on the way and looked up as he entered the lab.

And stopped.

A black shade stood leaning against the tank and looked up at Arianna with its little hands pressed against the glass. Gazing up at its mistress with clear worry and something else, he couldn't decipher.

Vlad noted that Arianna was in her ghost form, but still unconscious. He moved slowly towards them and the shade looked up like a frightened animal. It hurried to phase back into the tank and into its host before he could move.

Arianna shook shortly like she had been hit by a cold breeze, but returned to her calm floating again a second after, like nothing had happened.

Vlad placed the papers aside and moved up to the glass cylinder to scrutinized her. He knew her shades could have the life of their own, but not that they could think of leaving her body while she was sleeping.

He checked his machines to make sure she really was in a coma still and checked her vitals three times for the smallest indicator that she was awake.

There was no doubt, she was in a coma and perfectly still.

He sent her one last suspicious look before moved over to his computer and gave it a short firm command, "File 1675CT."

A digital blueprint appeared on the screen, along with a picture of the invention and the information he had noted along his work. It was one of his latest inventions and originally intended for Daniel, should the boy finally return to his senses and take the place at his side.

A small simple chip, designed to control the transition between the ghost and human form, by suppressing the waved of the hosts core, which would make Vlad the master (no pun intended) of when the host changed form between human and ghost.

A remote would make it possible for him to control the transformation and imprison the host in one of the forms, whenever he should see it fit.

Vlad laughed darkly and turned back to the tank. Arianna had changed shape again and it pleased Vlad to see that the two forms now were more or less similar in their size.

The only thing that separated them now was skin and hair color, the third eye and the fact that her ghost form seemed more muscular and toned in appearance, but the same thing was evident about Plasmius and Phantom's form, so that was only natural.

He tilted his head a bit and his distrustful expressing was preplaced by a friendlier one.

"You look lovely, my dear."

She didn't answer, but he thought that he saw her smile a little.

Chapter 2

Notes for the Chapter:

> Hey people!
> Its amazing to be back with this sequel and I hope you like it
> leave a comment if you feel like it

The Fenton Specter-speeder landed at the edge of the wood and the noise of the engines proved loud enough to disturbed the quiet peace and made the forest critters fled in terror, and leave the area deserted.

Danny Phantom phased out of the speeder before it even had a chance to land and looked around. He searched the area with his eyes and unfolded a map for comparison.

"You're sure that this is the place?"

Dani Phantom, his self-proclaimed cousin and female clone, phased out of the speeder. She, Jazz, Tucker and Sam came over to him and looked over his shoulder, to see the map for themselves. Dani looked around with uncertainty written on her little face and bit her lip.

"I think I remember it to have been here somewhere - but I'm not sure…uhm, Vlad teleported us back and forth most of the time and I just followed the other clones when we went back to Amity Park."

She looked up in guilt and hung her head like a kicked puppy, "sorry."

Dani Phantom had returned to Danny's life a month after Arianna had been kidnapped by Vlad. Danny had been in the midst of a battle with Skulker, when she'd simply appeared out of the blue and decided to help him with some serious ass-kicking.

Danny had actually been keen to take his frustrations out on the ghost, but almost forgot his own bubble of misery (there haven't been

many ghost around lately, so he needed a serious relief before he ended up taking it out on one of his friends), when the little halfa had popped into existence.

Danny had been insanely happy to finally see her again and they had celebrated their reunion by calling the others and given Dani a well-deserved meal at the Nasty Burger.

They had all been witness to the sight of the famished halfa, as she'd devouring six whole burgers, two large fries and had flushed it all down with one liter of cola, all by herself. She had even asked for dessert.

"So where have you been?" Danny had asked as she had digged into her jumbo ice-dessert, "we heard you were two states from here?"

Dani had bitten into her spoon and dried some chocolate sauce of the corner of her mouth with her dirty sleeve.

"Just a trip to New York City. I tried my luck as a superhero there, but the New Yorkers where a shitload of judgmental motherfuckers. I left when the Guys in white appeared. I thought I'd see how you guys were hanging and maybe settle down for a while."

No one had complained and Danny had offered her to stay at his place, which she had taken happily.

They'd returned to Fenton Works shortly after, where Jazz had returned to be there for Danny in the time of need and help searching for Arianna. She knew about Dani by her brother and the two greeted each other for the first time ever.

Danny had given Dani Arianna's old room in the Fenton Emergency Ops Centre, in lack of a better place for her to life/hide from his parents and she had looked around a little confused.

Arianna had cleaned up before the night she'd planned to go back home to her own country, but left a few things behind like a pot of flowers, a stack of books or two and a forgotten Christmas decoration – Danny had refused to pack anything down, since that would indicate that the previous owner wasn't going to come back and none

of the others had been up here since Arianna disappeared.

"Someone used to live here or something?" Dani asked and poked the dusty sheets on the bed.

Danny had sighed tiredly, "it's a long story ..."

Danny had sat her down with the others and told her the whole story. How Vlad Plasmius had approached Danny and asked for his help to save a fourth and unknown halfa from slavery in the ghost zone.

None of them had believed any of it at first, but it had quickly turned out that Vlad had told the truth. They had found the halfa and freed her, and brought her back to earth, after a long fight and persuasion of an alliance truce.

Danny and the others omitted intentionally to mention the part of the story about how Nightshade had murdered her way back to freedom and devoured her former slave master and trainer, before she injured and threatened Danny's friends and family.

It had seemed wrong to malign Arianna, now that she was gone and they were all more or less over it and she had made her amends. No need to bring it up again.

Dani had listened with interest, “she sounds pretty cool, where is she?”

"Gone," Danny said in a strange voice, "Plasmius gave us a year to ourselves, where he spied on us in secret and pulled the strings. He returned a month ago and attacked us. He forced her back into human form and took her with him."

Danny clenched his fists under the table. The memory of how Vlad had forced his way into their lives and exploited Arianna's kindness, by tricking and attacking them, was a hateful memory of Danny’s.

He could still here the sound of how Nightshade had begged for mercy, as her broken bracelet had forced her back into her wounded human form. A pitiful sound that had crushed the prideful image she had stood for in his mind.

She had been ready to sacrifice herself for Danny and he had been helpless and unable to help her, as she writhed in pain on the floor, threw up her insides and returned to her tormented human form.

Sam took his hand under the table and he saw the same thirst for revenge in her eyes as she spoke for him, "but we'll find her. We won't let Plasmius get away with this."

"Count me in," Dani said jauntily, "if you'll fight with Vlad, I'll help you."

They spent the next couple of weeks fighting both Skulker and the Fright Knight on shifts and meet up to make plans everywhere except for the Fenton house.

Danny suspected that Vlad still spied on them and it was no coincidence that both Skulker and the Fright Knight had chosen right now to attack Danny and his city on full time.

Vlad had sent them to keep them busy and possible prevent them from making any serious plans or rescue preparations. Well, if that wasn't too bad.

Danny and the others had quickly made a double strategy, where they pretended to held fake meetings in Danny's room and met secretly in different places to put the real plans together.

Danny remembered that Vlad had connected Arianna to some medical machines and kidnapped her on a stretcher, which had made them all more or less certain, that he had brought her to some sort of facility, that could serve as a infirmary or a laboratory where he could retain her safely.

Danny and the others highly suspect this to be a secret place, perhaps even below the ground. They had taken the time to write down all the locations where Vlad might keep a subterranean laboratory and they had studied them systematically one by one in order to break in to them each.

First stop was Vlad's mayor office.

They had sneaked into the building after a fight with Skulker and

used Tucker's invisibility suits to move unseen. It had been exactly like Danny remembered it. Stylish, cold and dedicated to the hideous art, that was Vlad's face plastered everywhere.

Jazz had giving it one looked and shaken knowledgeable on her head, "I knew it. The man has serious narcissistic personality disorder."

Sam and Jazz searched the room for hidden panels and doors, while Tucker checked the computer desktop and hacked into it with no further problems. Danny had phased through the walls and floor to see if the site should be connected to any underground room, but found nothing.

He moved on to Dani, who rummaged through the drawers of the walls filing cabinets and help her search though some of the papers. As it got boring and gave no real results, he moved to Tucker by the desk and leaned over him to look at the more personal things on the desk.

A single photo frame was the only personal artifact on the table, besides the computer and Danny suspects the computer to be purely work-related and not a personal one.

The picture of his mother smiled back to him and Danny were more or less sure that if he went home and rummaged their private photo albums, he would discover that there was missing a photo somewhere.

What a creep.

Danny felt anger rush through him.

It was not because of the thought of Vlad entering their house in secret that bothered him or the fact that he had dared to display a picture of his mother like this. What really hit him, was the fact that the frame was covered with a light layer of dust.

As if it hadn’t been touched for a long time.

It was the last final proof Danny needed. Vlad was no longer interested in his mother ... he had found a new victim.

The others had looked up in surprised as he crushed the picture frame in his hands and watched as the photo curled up like ash in his hand. Danny had left the office and the others had followed cautiously, none of them wanted to get in his way when he acted like this.

Sam had looked after him with a sad frown, she had hoped to get through to him by now and the others had counted on her to be the one to calm down his bottled anger, but not even she could make sense of him anymore.

She didn't recognize this angry boy. She wanted her friend back, maybe more than anyone else.

Dani had watched her cousin with surprise and leaned toward Sam with a whisper, "what's his problem?"

Sam had bite her lip, not entirely knowing what to say, "It's complicated, Dani."

"How's that?"

"Arianna ... let's just say Vlad is not interested in Danny's mother anymore."

Dani was still confused and Sam had whispered her the rest in the ear, when she thought Danny wasn't aware.

"What? *Ew!"*

They had sneaked into Vlad's mansion later that month and tiptoed in the middle of the night to Amity Park's Ultra Posh Polter Heights neighborhood. It had almost been a repeat of the mayor office.

The empty accommodate and long dusty shadows, had testified that the place hadn't been used in weeks and when Danny had moved the abhorrent Napoleon/Vlad painting of the wall, they had found that the portal he hid behind it had been turned out off and left empty.

Vlad had apparently shut down the portal some time ago and neither Danny or Tucker was technical skilled enough in that department to figure out how long it had been closed, or where the power switch

was located in the house.

It had led them to the next place on the list.

Vlad's mountain chalet.

Danny folded the map in a way that was clearly wrong, but took no care of it as he turned to the others with a scowl. They waited patiently for him to give them further instructions and Danny sighed by the sight of them.

You didn’t need to be a genius to understand they took him for the obvious candidate as the leaders of The Phantom team (or Ghost-Getters, as Jazz still insisted on calling them. Dani was now Ghost-Getter number 5) and he had to make a decision.

"Okay, how about this? – Dani and I take a short flight around and call you if we find something from the air, while you try to find some forest path or signs leading to the chalet. Either way, we will meet here again in an hour."

"Okay," Sam replied confident and chose a direction, "see you in an hour."

Dani was more than eager to take off with him and Danny was painfully aware of how much she strove to be of assistance to him and everyone else. She had told them that she had left New York, because of the Guys in White, but Danny had a suspicion that she had met the similar resistance he had been faced with when he first started his role as a hero in Amity Park.

Phantom was now a beloved and admired hero among the city’s residents (well mostly the young citizens, but beggars couldn’t be choosers), but the road to this positive position had been harsh and Danny had been forced to overcome the city's prejudice, fear of ghosts and spontaneous hunts on him, before he was described as more than just that ghost, who were chasing other ghosts in the papers.

The only ones that still didn’t looked at Phantom with kind eyes these days, was his parents and Valerie, all of who were the leading ghost

hunters in Amity. Danny had gotten used to it by now and made it an art to always escape the crime scene before they arrived at his fights.

They were no bigger problem, than the fact that Danny had to live with his parents who had vowed him as their mortal enemy, without the knowledge that he and the Phantom was one and the same person.

It always gave a little extra spice to meals around the table in Fenton Works, to listen to their macabre talks of dissecting Phantom. Danny kind of stopped caring about their talks about ripping him apparat molecule by molecule and just focused on his meatloaf.

Some things you just got used to over time.

After he had got his territory under control and closed most of the ghosts out, he had gradually gone from fighting ghosts to common human criminals in the city and was widely known among the police, as the one who always reached first at the crime scene, leaving the criminals tied to a lamppost or pipes for them to handle.

It seemed to suit them just fine and Danny could be at peace with the cops.

Danny wouldn't exactly call himself a superhero anymore, but everyone else seemed to see him as one and he suppose he just had to accept it. But it seemed that Dani hadn't been accepted by the people in New York.

Something told him that she had only chosen to become superhero because of him and he winced in guilt. He wasn't her father, big brother or actual cousin, but he really should have taken better care of her.

Protected her at least and perhaps kept her from leaving, instead of just letting her go alone into the world on her own. Dani was perhaps old enough to make decisions for herself in appearance, but when the truth was to be told, she had only been created three years back.

A toddler with his memories and a teens body.

Not a stable cocktail.

"Hey, Dani," he said and made sure that she was right behind him.

She flew up beside him. Eager to be at his service, "what is it?"

“Listen…I,” he searched for the right words and scratched his neck a bit awkward. He wasn’t really mature enough to see himself as a caretaker or some authority figure, but he guessed he had to be one for Dani's sake, "I just wanted to say I'm glad you came back. We’ve worried about you, ya know."

Dani looked up at him in surprise and he thought he saw her brightened up a bit.

"Really?” she asked happily, before she remembered to keep her cool and shrugged like she didn’t care, “hey, you shouldn’t be, I’m doing fine on my own – but hey, I’ve kind of missed you guys to."

Danny smiled. Dani’s spirited personality and self-assurance reminded him of himself when he was younger and he guessed that was only logical, since Dani was the closest you would get to his mental younger self.

He guessed that she had to be fifteen now. Too young to stand on her own feet, but too old to be regarded as a child anymore.

The clingy way she kept close to him and searched for the mountain chalet, while dedicated him her full attention, was almost heartbreaking. Dani had to be pretty lonely and inwardly insecure, in need of guidance and security. It was something he could relate to.

He had just lost his own halfa mentor ... maybe he could be Dani’s now?

Dani made a halfhearted protest when he ruffled her hair and Danny rolled his eyes. He hadn’t been all that interested in her when they’d first meet, but now when he was older and more mature, he guessed it was kind of like being an older brother or something.

“Anyway, welcome back to the team, we could use some more members right now,” he continued and searched the ground with his eyes.

The forest seemed endless and the close treetops made it hard to spot any sign of the chalet. Dani beamed by his side.

“Anything for ma cousin,” she replied in a mocking street way and Danny gave her a playing push. She returned the favor and they laughed as they played in the fresh mountain air. They almost missed the chalet as they played tag and they lowered to the ground.

Danny remembered why they were her again and made a grave face. Dani copied him and her hands flared with green ecto-energy.

He picked up his phone and sent the others a short message with coordinates, before nodding to Dani and leading forward. Danny kicked down the doors and made a stand, expecting some kind of trap or security.

Dani followed him closely and looked around, “looked abandoned…”

“Maybe,” Danny mumbled and they phased down the floor. The underground facility was held in darkness, but both Dani and Danny saw just fine with their ghost night vision.

The destroyed clone tanks and machinery looked as it had when they’d left Vlad after their escape, those many years ago and Dani watched the empty containers with a shudder. Danny placed a protecting hand on her back and let her seek protection behind him and his white cloak.

The computer system was covered in dusk and the electricity was out of order, none of it active or connected to power.

Danny sighed, “either Vlad has left this place for good or this dust and spider web is professional made. Looks like this place was a dead end as well.”

It was too early to cross out the location from the list and Danny wanted Tucker to take a look on the old computer systems first, to see if there was any clues to where another hideout could be placed, but deep down he knew that this place was just as abandoned as Vlad’s home in Amity.

The knowledge of Vlad’s secrets clone laboratory under the chalet,

had given him false hopes of finding Plasmius here again and now that Danny was here, he knew finding the man here would have been too good to be true.

Vlad wasn't stupid.

He had planned the kidnapping before handed and made his planes while Danny screwed around with his friends and Arianna.

The castle in Wisconsin had to be the place.

-

Dani watched Danny closely, but held some distance. As he stood there searching the empty screens with that harsh look on his face, it was hard for her to recognize him as the rebellious carefree teen superhero ghost, that she had meet three years ago.

She had been relieved when he'd taken her in without second thought or any calculating questions. Dani had hoped to find Danny exactly as she had left him, but she probably should had known that time and distance changed people.

Danny seemed and looked older, more serious and unsettling ... *focused.*

Like a ticking bomb.

Dani didn't know more about this Arianna person than Danny and his friends had told, but the way Danny searched for her and took their defeats, seemed a little too personally.

This unknown halfa was clearly not his girlfriend, since the goth girl appeared just as obsessed about finding her as Danny (just at a more natural level), so what was this halfa to him again?

Why did he take it so personal that Vlad wanted to bang her?

Dani felt jealousy stir within her. It was not a feeling she had felt since she had stood side by side with the other clones and had fought for Vlad's love. The part of her that was still influenced by Vlad Plasmius, told her to mess up the search somehow…

But Vlad had taken this woman…taken her back would piss him off big time and be a nice way of getting some revenge, for misusing her and almost sacrificing here in order to make his perfect *male* halfa clone.

If that wasn't enough, he had tried take her life after…studying her goo to perfect his son. Ew?

Dani left Danny to think and ended up in the living room of mountain chalet, where she took place in one of the ruined armchairs. Unaware that Danny had sat exactly where she was, three years back and had left it again in a hurry to avoid Vlad's ghost rays.

She grimaced when she almost fell through the hole in the chair's back and exhaled.

"This visits isn't as funny as I had hoped it would be…"

She said straight up, when a loud growl came from behind the armchair. Dani turned slowly around with her heart in her throat and peaked out of the hole. Two red eyes locked with hers.

She screamed and jumped out of the chair in time to dodge the great green claw that sliced the chair in four chunks. She stepped back with her jaw open and wide eyes, like a rabbit caught in the lights of a car.

The green bear-like creature threw the ruined chair to the side and turned to her with dead eyes and froth hanging from its bared fangs. Dani had never seen a bear in real life, but she was pretty sure bears didn't have four arms or green fur.

"You-u a g-ghost!?" she stuttered in fear and moved backwards as it moved towards her. A green ghost ray hit the enormous animal and slammed it through the chalets wall. Danny Phantom arrived with glowing hands and grabbed her, "Dani are you okay?"

Dani snapped out of her fearful daze and felt a moment of bliss. The way he held her protective and had saved her made her heart burst. Danny was really concerned for her…her alone. She felt like thanking him or something.

“I’m fine.”

Danny turned to the bear-shaped hole in the wall, as the beast could be heard outside.

“Come on, let’s get outta here,” he said and grabbed her, before taking of and phased them out and in to the air. The both hovered over the chalet in order to spot the ghost bear, before a scream reached them.

They both turned to the forest and Danny gasped, “Sam!”

Dani followed him fearful as they shot through the air in search for the others, “what was that thing!?”

Danny forced her to catch up to him, not waiting for her or slowing down.

“Ghost animal experiments!” he shouted over the wind, “Vlad made them years ago – I forgot all about them, I’m such an idiot!”

Dani was going to tell him he was anything but an idiot, but another scream told them that they were close and Dani spotted a bunch of big green bodies moving around down below the treetops.

Danny wasted no time and lowered to the ground and hit the ground hard, before shooting forward and tackle the wolf-ghost that was going for Sam and Jazz. Dani made a stand by Tucker and shoot her ghost-ray at something that looked like some kind of towheaded mountain lynx.

“Are you guys okay?”

Tucker fired his bazooka against the ghost rat with five eyes and loaded fast, “those things came out of nowhere – they’re freakier than what Danny told!”

Dani had no doubts believing that and saw Sam run for the speeder. For a second Dani though she was going to leaving them behind, but then the speeders weaponry came to life and shoot after the ghost animals.

The wolf howled in pain and ran with its tail between its legs and was fast followed by the lynx and rat. The ghost mole, ram and bison continued the fight and Danny made both him and jazz intangible, when the ram tried smashing them against a tree.

It knocked itself out, as it ran full speed into the tree and collapsed on the ground.

Dani shoot after the bison and took Tucker for a flight, when it tried to get them with its horns.

“Let’s go!” Danny yelled and took Jazz. She struggled to get free and fight on, “what about the chalet!?”

The ghost badger jumped the speeder and Sam removed it with the Fenton windshield wipers.

“Abandoned!” Danny yelled back and forced Jazz into the speeder. Tucker sat down beside Sam, as she started the engines and shoot after the badger. He turned to them as they lifted to the air and sighed, “all that planning for nothing. What a waste of time.”

Dani sad down beside Danny and saw his eyes harden, “I know. We’re losing time.”

Chapter 3

Notes for the Chapter:

> Hey people
> hope you all had a nice valentines day - mine was mostly working on a university paper due to next morning, but you can always treat yourself with hot chocolate and feel you actually celebrated the day
> hope you enjoy and leave a comment if you feel like it

The laboratory laid in deep silence and darkness, only the gentle green glow from the tank challenging it.

Vlad observed how Arianna's hair moved rhythmically in peaceful waves and from time to time it would change to pink. It wasn't unusual that his patient to spontaneously switched between her two forms anymore.

He had noted every shift and had come to that discovery that the unconscious hybrid would alternate between her human and ghost form every three hours, if she wasn't disturbed by dreams or noises outside her glass tank.

He wondered quietly whether the same observation could have been observed under his own state of comatose those many years ago.

If it had, it had not been noted – he had read all of his previous hospital files to track down all the doctors and staff, who might have suspect or known of his half-mortal state, and made sure to eliminate all information and witnesses to his long period of illness, leading to his final transformation to half-ghost.

He had read all that was scientific observed of himself, studied them, learned from them. Followed it up whit his own studies and collection of information. Come to understand the essence and existence of what a ghost-hybrid was.

Half-dead, half-alive. A ghoul and abomination among humans, a breathing corpse.

An in-between exsistence.

Despite the great progress of his powers, the fame and success this new state had brought Vlad over the years, smoldering anger still remained in him and kept him determined in his thirst for revenge.

Jack Fenton, former friend, and mortal enemy. The man who had turned Vlad into what he was today, with his simple incompetence and idiocy.

Reconciliation with the man would had be easier to endure, if the fool hadn't been so uneasily and painfully unaware of the consequences of his own actions and had proven incapable of feeling the slightest bit of shame or guilt from them.

But guilt was not like Jack. Oh no. Anything that did not hit him personally would never penetrate deeper into the thick head, than the large amount of fudge he consumed daily.

He had continued his happy little life after Vlad had been half killed and put Vlad behind him as easy as candy wrapping. Unconcerned and unaware of the harm he caused others. Forgotten Vlad and left him to rot for seven years alone in a hospital.

Not a word, not a postcard…just a wedding invitation.

Vlad moved from the tank and all of its promises, and turn his fully attention to his computer system. It was a system he himself had designed to perfection and made him fully capable of configure and controlling its endless databases anywhere on the planet, whenever he wanted or needed it and of course – hidden from all other systems, private and governmental in the world.

Even the satellite leading the system was Vlad's own and hidden among Jupiter's rings.

Vlad placed his hands behind his back and watched his screens with a calculating approach. Voice firm and collected as always, "file 02DFCB."

Multiple files popped up on the screen and spread strategically.

"File 40FDS."

Photos and videos played themselves without sound and several albums traversed in front of him as a long movie tape. The saved snapshots and clips from his spy-bug collection popped up one by one and Vlad sighed with a heavy heart.

He had delayed it long enough. He had to do it to continue his plan.

"... File 29OIP56," he continued with a clear voice and watched with tired eyes, as the large folder of cloning files, notes, DNA collections and calculations unfold on the screens.

Maddie Fenton smiled aware or unaware of her photographer from her numerous images and video clips of her filled his screens in a silent and disjointed film. Nevertheless, there was a clear system in this chaotic presentation and Vlad knew the plot all too well.

He had started this collection dedicated to the ghost huntress, shortly after he started his first million.

Vlad was born into money, but had never tried investing or use such large amount of money independent, like he had done with his new fortune and was pleasantly surprised when he discovered just how far you could get in the human system with mammon.

He had followed Maddie's comings and goings with private detectives, home sent polaroid photos and collection of Public Files. It had hurt and tormented him to see the way she had continued her life without him and the fact that she had chosen to shape it with Jack Fenton of all people.

Vlad had turned away when Jasmine Fenton had come into the world and turned to his rising as a billionaire instead.

Over the years, he had immersed himself in his own power empire and studies of the occult, where his power in both the living and dead worlds grew by leaps and bounds.

But she had never left his thoughts entirely. He had looked her up

again year after and discovered that the Fenton family had grown from three to four and this time it was a son.

Envy and anger had led him to short out his entire office's electronic system with a discharge from his ghostly powers and while his employees ran wildly around to find the cause of the blackout and restart the building generators, Vlad had made plans in the darkness.

Vlad at the time, had owned no intention or desire to have someone else at his side, than the woman he had claimed to love since college. And although the children were Jack's as well, Vlad was convinced that he would be a much more suitable father and caretaker in their lives.

The fact that they were Maddie's son and daughter were all that mattered.

Vlad had found himself with a complete profile of both children lying in front of him on his disk, when he had sent his vultures out to murder Jack and planned the reunion.

Jasmine Ally Fenton, "Jazz" among acquaintances, was an unusually intelligent girl and had already gained admission to all the country's major universities before she turned sixteen.

Vlad would look forward to offer her the best teacher and tutors money and power could give and made the adoptive papers ready.

The second profile was an entirely different story, but no less interesting.

Daniel "Danny" James Fenton had inherited his mother's face, attitude and appearance, which almost got Vlad's eyes to linger a little longer than necessary.

The boy was not gifted academically as his sister, but an investigation showed that the boy had great potential and if the results his flight simulator games were otherwise correct, the boy possessed an unusually extensive knowledge of flight control and spaceship functions, to a level that suited a trained astronaut.

His grades could never give him access to the space program, but

Vlad had contacts and could easily send the boy to Mars if he wanted. All he needed was to start his own space program and Daniel would be in the air.

Vlad had all forecasts clear in his mind and waited for the vultures to do their work, in order for him to receive the grieving widow in his home and steal back her heart.

But for the first time in Vlad's adult life, the billionaire and ghost-hybrid encountered an unforeseen change in his plans. A change that would mark him for the rest of his life.

Daniel Fenton was the ghost-boy.

-

Vlad had long been aware of this human-loving ghost's existence. Gossip ran quickly in the ghost zone and the ghost-boy had emerged around the same time as The Fenton's ghost portal had stood finished. A location Vlad was observing closely.

Vlad had been lighter interested in the portal and how far Jack had gotten in his work, and sent different groups of ghosts though the portal in order to test him: later it became a side check, as he learned that this ghost-boy seemed to circle it faithfully and fought most of the ghost Vlad sent at it.

He had sent stronger ghosts to the portal as some kind of experiment and collected information for further studies.

But never in his wildest imagination could Vlad had believed, that Jack and Maddie Fenton would have gone that far as to force their own son through the same transformation as Vlad himself.

But Vlad had always been able to pride himself on being a flexible man and after he had put the boy to bed after their first meeting, he had refined his plan. Daniel seemed to have great potential, but was far behind Vlad's level of powers and durability.

Vlad could give him guidance and experience that no one else could offer. He would make the perfect apprentice.

He would be the perfect son.

The boy had to be desperate for enlightenment about his transformation and control of his powers, making it easy for him to step in and make him take an offer of guidance.

He would be easy to persuade to his side and if first Maddie's son was with Vlad, she would soon see reason and join them together with young Jasmine.

Vlad got a bitter taste in the mouth and stared at some of the early pictures on the screen. Memories of failures coming back to him one by one. The boy had rejected him, him Vlad Masters and for what? A foolish colossus of a man who could barely take care of his family, if ever provide for them!?

It was with mixed emotions that Vlad had let them leave his castle, but Vlad had always had the philosophy that the battle could be lost, but the war would always be to his favor.

But it had been a war with many casualties and long terms of suffering for the man. The boy was incredible stubborn and whatever Vlad did, neither he nor his mother would see reason and go over to his side.

Both Daniel and Jasmine had exploited him at that point and even Maddie had betrayed him, with his hopes as a means. Vlad had had enough, but the thought of giving up on all the work and years he had placed into them, had made him hesitate.

To abandon them would be the same as a defeat.

Admitted he had lost.

And Vlad Masters never lost a battle. That was how the cloning project had been born.

Vlad often looked back at this turning point in his life, with wonderment and disquiet. To clone Daniel with the intention of obtain a hybrid son, had been an idea born out of sheer want and foolish dreams.

Vlad had always wanted a family and children was part of his dream of the future, but it was only when he learned the boy's secret, that the desire for a half-ghost heir had become evident.

Vlad massaged his temples with a pained expression. The entire cloning project had been a disaster from the start. He had jumped into it spontaneously without further planning or real distinction and that alone should have told him that it was a bad idea.

It had been a plan born out of pure desperation and nothing good ever came out of desperation.

Cloning Daniel had seemed like the perfect solution at the time, but even without the unstable clones, the problematic mid-way transformation-DNA and betrayal of the treacherous Daniella Phantom ... Vlad had known deep down that he'd just postponed the inevitable.

Cloning Maddie.

Vlad had delved into Daniel's cloning and its many problems, in a pathetic attempt to postpone the next step in the project and Vlad could only look back at himself with disgust.

If truth was to be told, he would never be able to clone Maddie. He had told himself he could with Daniel, because the boy had proved too difficult to handle, but Vlad couldn't fool himself when it came to her.

Vlad had never want an imitation or been able to love one... he wanted the real thing. Had always would and probably always will.

You could create an imitation and you could program it to comply with all your wishes and desires, but it would never be right. You could create, but the soul could not be copied. Like Pygmalion before him, Vlad had learned a bitter lesson.

He was not a god.

He had taken the defeat with Daniel's clone as a pathetic excuse to put the project in abeyance and had gratified put the whole misery behind him, without wanting to admit the madness behind it to

himself.

Vlad looked at his monitors and pulled one of the files forward. It originated from Maddie cloning calculations results and the half-ghost read it with a sigh. Cloning was an artificial and a highly tricky affair.

Even children who were born successfully in glass through artificial insemination today, was created with problems and although Vlad's own results was close to perfection, the reason behind cloning both Daniel and Maddie had more than one reason behind it.

A clone of Maddie would be infertile. She would never be able to bear a child of Vlads and even if he had owned a perfectly clean human DNA himself, the chances of a child between them would be small and the risk of miscarriage too high.

He had told himself that cloning Daniel would eliminate the need for a child between them and would satisfied him, but…Vlad let the file go and pulled a new forward.

It was the notes he recorded after his meeting with the legendary ghost and timekeeper Clockwork, and had been led through a minor educational journey, consisting of Daniel’s many time-tampering and alteration of the time lines.

Vlad had seen himself become one with Daniel and creating the specter Dark Phantom, in a destroyed timeline and world of Armageddon, where Daniel’s human half had been brutally murdered and Vlad left to the life of a hermit in the ruins of the world and his own regrets.

Although the idea of having lost his ghost-half and see Maddie and Daniel dying before his eyes, had been painful enough for him ... Daniel’s second time-tampering had hit him the hardest.

All Vlad's hopes and dreams had unfolded before him, as he had watched how the boy had changed his fate and saved him from becoming a victim of the portal.

In that timeline, he had won Maddie’s love and built the life with her,

as they always should have been destined to. They should have been happy, but this timeline had revealed something quite essential to Vlad.

His relationship with Maddie had appeared to be tense and suffocating. She had held secrets in their home and even after years of marriage, she would still choose an acne-infested ghost-hybrid over him.

This Maddie even murdered her husband by throwing him into the ghost portal! It would all had been incredible heartbreaking, had it not been for the impression this timeline Vlad had given him.

This Vlad had shot his wife down without regret and obviously been completely ignorant of whether his wife was unfaithful to him or not, as long as she just stayed part of his property. What, however what had hit Vlad the hardest, was the fact that this Vlad and Maddie didn't have seemed to have any children.

Vlad had always wanted to be a father and he knew Maddie had to feel the same – so why hadn't they raised children in this alternate timeline?

With a long-drawn sigh, Vlad let his notes go and took a step away from the screens to admire the digital shrine that was his obsession of Maddie Fenton.

He watched its glory and beauty for a second, before inhaling and finally spoke, "begin the instant and complete removal of all files and saves, concerning the subject 'Maddie' in my system and backup system."

His hard voice made a slight echo in the silent room and he closed his eyes as the Maddie hologram materialized.

"Are you sure, Pumpkin?"

Vlad reopened his eyes and turned to looked at her. Just take her in. She was the closest thing, with the exception of a clone, he had ever come to Maddie's love. He had made her from the purest of his heart and countless hours of work had gone to her creation.

She had served him as a faithful – albeit erroneous – assistant and helped him to dream for some time.

But now it was time to wake up.

His voice failed and he had to collect himself in order to implement his venture. It was with a lump in his throat, that he exhaled and made eye contact with those purple orbs.

"I am absolutely sure. Start the process."

A downloading bar appeared on the middle screen and counted rapidly from 0 to 100%. Vlad felt a brief moment of revelation, as he watched the destruction of 20 years of obsession and work vanish between his fingers like sand.

Plasmius whispered in his mind. Told him that he could stop the process and pretend nothing had happened. He could continue on this path, that was the dream of Maddie and do as before with no one else knowing than himself.

He didn’t have to give up on revenge…

His ghost sense filled his lungs with heath and many years of training had made him capable of keeping the smoke inside his body, instead of releasing it visible through his nostrils.

He had disguised it with cigarettes in the beginning of his time as a ghost-hybrid, before he built an inspiratory technique up and improved his ability to hide it from others' eyes.

He felt Arianna’s ghost signature as she had changed to Nightshade again. The knowledge of her serene present in the lab next to this room, gave him the last courage he needed and he felt more at ease.

He watched without interfering as the bar reached 100% and the screens went emptied and stood blank in front of him. The Maddie hologram glitzed violently and Vlad gave her an apologetic glance, "forgive me."

The hologram self-destructing with an empty artificial smile and with her, erased the last trace of his obsession of Maddie Fenton out of his

life.

Vlad stood in darkness for a time. A lightness spread in his mind and the feeling of having thrown a yoke from his shoulders, led him to breathe more freely.

The serene expression on his face lasted a moment before it was replaced by his signature smirk and he patted his hands together.

“File ARI895.”

An impersonal hologram assistant materialized and Vlad took seat in the chair in front of the screens.

"Now. Restart ‘the Danish language learning program for rich dummies’ again."

Behind him, the chessboard’s white pieces lighted up by the hollow light from the screens. The white runner stood alone in the center, surrounded by black pieces and with white pawns behind him.

The white queen stood next to the black king on the black ends board. If she wanted to move, she would have to take another piece or be sacrifices herself. The black queen lay left on the sideline with the white king.

Both out of the play.

Chapter 4

Notes for the Chapter:

> Hey people :D
> hope you're up for another chapter - here we go!
> hope you enjoy - leave a comment if you feel like it

Danny inspected his plate without any real interest.

His parents talked about some new invention and he knew he probably should be listening and pick up how to avoid this new invention of ghostly terror for later, when they activated it inside the house – or in his presence as they tend to do.

But he had no further interest in listening today and shut them out for a change. Focus on more urgent matters.

Or at least urgent to him.

Jazz had been forced to return to her studies and return to campus, which fractured team Phantom for a while, leaving him with their parents until the next holidays or long weekends.

He gave his backpack a light kick, as Skulker buzzed inside the thermos that held him captive and Danny expected that the great hunter was currently trying find new ways to escape the soup container.

Danny would give it an hour or two before the Fright knight came storming into the living room on his majestic horse and did one of his long medieval speeches.

Skulker would escape then, if Danny didn't send him back through the portal first and then they could start all over again tomorrow.

Danny pushed his chicken around the peas. Pierced a potato like he wanted to kill it.

Both idiots claimed that they would take over his territory on behalf of Vlad Plasmius and even though Danny was well aware it was a cover to keep him busy, the idea of just giving it to them seemed more and more appealing.

If they got his territory, they might just fuck of and let Danny be, long enough for him to escape from Amity Park for a second and go to Vlad's castle in Wisconsin.

Sam and Tucker had forced him to wait until they all got time together and Jazz had tried to push him all the way to the end of her exam period before he went to the next state.

All something that made the time before action longer than necessary and took precious time – and time was not what Arianna had most of.

None of them had any real idea of what Vlad was actually doing to her, but it couldn't possibly be any good.

Had it been Danny who was imprisoned, he was more than convinced that Nightshade would have thrown everything she had in her hands and just stormed the castle with a swarm of her shades in furious tiger-mom style.

No doubt.

None of the others seemed to be able to follow him when he said they just had to go and lead the two ghosts with them if necessary. If they traveled with the portals, they could be there in an hour and search the castle in no time, but it seemed like everyone was working against him.

In what world was parent's anger, school tests and curfews more important than a friend's life?

Danny was sick and tired of waiting. It had already been three months since Arianna was kidnapped and just the thought of it held Danny's duplicates up at night.

Making up all kinds of disturbing images of Vlad keeping her like some kind of slave somewhere in his creepy cold castle, deep in the countryside where no one could hear you scream.

"I'm full, can I go? I have some homework to do," he said without further conviction, but it fooled his father, although his mother looked worried and watched him as he left for the stairs.

"Jack, have you noticed Danny seems ... a little inattentive these days?"

"I have no idea what that word means, but if you mean that our son has been paltry and musty for months now, I'm in – I'll talk to him," Jack exclaimed enthusiastic and yanked one of his new inventions up from the table where he had been working while eating, "this darling sucks all the bad energies and ghost influences out of your system, like a high hippie on a runaway festival. That's bound to put him in a better mood."

Maddie just hummed, impressed by the design, but still a little worried about their son. She decided to let him be as the door to his room closed.

Danny locked the door to his cluttered room and threw himself on the bed. He managed to wallow in its own stew of self-pity, anxiety and pinned-up anger before his phone buzzed and he took it without worthy the display as much as a glance, "what?"

"Well hello to you too," came it sarcastic from Jazz before she changed into a more sympathetic tone, "*listen, I know you're probably going to take this adversely, but I don't think we should go to Wisconsin*."

Danny sat up straight and tried to keep his voice low in case his parents had decided to follow him upstairs, "what do you mean we shouldn't go to Wisconsin!? That's where Vlad is and where he is, Arianna's bound to be."

"*Danny – wait where are you right now?*"

"Home?"

"Vlad might be listening in – move," she warned him and Danny let the two rings run over him, before he flew out the window and landed on a random building.

"Okay I'm out – care to explain your crazy talk, Jazz?"

Jazz sighed on the other side, *"Danny, I have been following Vlad's business on the TV and internet, and I tell you, I don't think he's in Wisconsin. The paparazzi found him in Japan last Saturday."*

Danny scowled, voice all but jeering, "Jazz – it's a duplicate, trust me. He's there, we have checked all the other locations and that fanatic wouldn't let all those Packer collection pieces out of range – he's there."

"*I beg to differ. Vlad would know that you'll come looking for her there, Danny. We risk to much by going to his top secured castle in the first place and be rational, little brother. If you were a crazy cheesehead fruitloop, where would you go with a captive?*"

Danny ran a tired hand through his bangs as he flew down to street level and walked into a park. His hair fell back into his eyes. He needed a haircut.

"I would be going to a whole other country," he sighed and could almost hear her nod all seriously and assure of herself.

"*Exactly.*"

"Then what the hell do you suggest we do, huh? Make a wide world search and put up posters with a stapler?"

"*We need to study him, Danny,*" she replied instructive as if he was dense, "*we need to find out where he goes and lives – he could have a holiday home on Hawaii or a country house in Russia for all we know. We have to be smart about this, Danny.*"

Danny scratched his neck, "why Russia?"

"*Vlad's full name is 'Vladimir Dimitri Masters', that sounds pretty Russian to me – I looked him up on Wikipedia,*" she explained, proudly of herself and Danny felt like killing the man.

"What a fucking hypocrite! He goes around calling me 'Daniel', while he has used a shorter version of his own name this whole time! What the hell is his problem!?"

"*Beats me – but that's not the only thing I wanted to talk with you about,*"

Jazz added sternly, "*we have to talk about Dani.*"

Danny sat down on one of the swings on the dark playground and stared a little ahead, "what about her?"

"*Danny…there's more than one halfa in your life, you know,*" she began gently, "*Dani has had a tough time and she really needs you now. She needs a stable caretaker and reliable person that can help her to mold into society and normal life. I'm not saying that we should stop searching for Arianna, but you need to stop this crazy obsessed behavior and be there for Dani – you're scaring her, Danny.*"

"I know," he groaned and tried getting rid of the headache that was starting to build up in his head. The lack of sleep and loss of appetite seemed to have made a number on him. He felt like he was going to freak out if something didn't work out soon.

"*Do you really?*" she pressed, clearly not believing him one second, "*she a young girl, who needs a home and someone she can look up to without fearing abandonment, Danny.*"

"I *know!*" he replied a little harder, "I'm aware of her, okay? I'm trying, but we have to find Arianna to."

"*I'm worried for her to, you know – but all this stress and traveling isn't good for your mental health, Danny Fenton. You have a responsibility you need to dedicate yourself to right now – maybe we should take a session and talked with her about how she feels. Maybe about how you both feel right now.*"

Danny huffed, "who are you, my psychiatrist now?"

"*I'm always your psychiatrist, Danny, you can't escape your late puberty problems forever.*"

Danny rolled his eyes, "ups, can't hear you, puberty has weakened my hearing and apparently, the phone reception to."

Jazz protested, but he had already ended the call and placed the phone back into his pocket. He exhaled slowly and turned his head as a new sound emerged out of nothing to his left.

He fell of the swing with a panicked yelp and ecto-ray, as Dani materialized next to him on the other swing.

"*Holy Shit!* I could have hit you, Dani!" he gasped and tried getting his high-alerted nerves back under control.

The little halfa just blew him a raspberry, "pfft, you have to get up early to get to this ninja-ghost right here," she replied smartly and pointed to herself with two thumbs. Danny got control of his beating heart and returned to sit on the swing.

"Dani I mean it, don't jump me, seriously."

She made a pout and turned away from him. Danny bite his lip, already regretting his harsh tone. If he was to raise this little halfa and be there for her, now was probably a good time to start. Maybe he could do this right for a change.

"Hey…you wanna see who can jump the longest from the swings?" he asked hesitantly.

She lighted up instantly and they started swinging. There was no people in the park this late, but both of them turned back to their human form just in case and to an outsider, they probably looked like two big teenage siblings, having some quality time on the kids swings.

"Hey Danny, this Arianna person..." Dani began, taken the lead in getting her swing the highest, "is she in a circus or something?"

Danny looked at her in surprise, "what makes ya think that?"

Dani jumped of her swing and made a nice length of ten meters, where ghost powers might or might not have helped her little.

"Well, I just found at least twenty different kinds of knives placed all over the bedroom in the Ops center. Most of them under the bed."

Danny made his jump a little shorter than Dani's in order to let her win and grinned.

"Really? Knives?" he asked with a grimace and Dani copied it – or

maybe that was just a face she had inherited from him; Danny weren't completely sure.

"Bread knives, butcher knives, hunting knives, two machetes – I even found a rusty butterknife under the sink in the bathroom. She has a liking for sharp objects or something?"

Danny couldn't stop laughing, "she liked sharpening stuff in the kitchen – but I've never seen her make me a peanut-butter sandwich with a machete before."

Dani snorted, "she kinda sound like some crazy housewife, when you guys talk about her."

Danny dried his eyes and sat back down on the swing again. She copied him and he shrugged at her reply.

"I guess you could call her the mother of the group. She taught me a lot of new fighting techniques and how to use new ghost powers – I could show you, if you want?"

"Really?" she exclaimed happily and Danny gave her a crocked smile.

"Of course, that's what family's for, right?"

Dani made a genuinely grin and surprised Danny by hugging him. He closed his arms around her a second later and hoped that she hadn't taken the second of hesitation as a sigh of resentment. The whole situation gave him a feeling of déjà vu.

Back when Danny had been fourteen and most down after a fight or failed a test, he had often called out a single duplicate in his lonely times to get at hug.

He knew it was sad and pathetic that a guy with perfectly caring friends and family would need a copy of himself to find comfort, but he had needed it at that time and sometimes…he still did.

He promised himself that Dani wouldn't have to go through all that to and hugged her a little closer. The strange vison of him holding and comforting his younger self made his eyes burn and he buried his face in her wild sidebangs.

“I’m so sorry, Dani.”

Dani looked up at him with a tilted head, “what for?”

Danny tried to find the right words, words someone should have told him all those years ago, “I’m sorry I let you alone for so long, Dani. I was just a kid that couldn’t control my own life or powers, but that doesn’t justify anything.”

Danny sighed and forced himself to look at her without pity or self-hatred – she didn’t need to see him like that. She need someone in control she could rely on and most of all…she need an apology.

“I should have taken care of you back then. You were just a kid and I should have been there for you. Not just let you leave and go out on your own. That was wrong of me – I let you down.”

Dani’s eyes filled with tears and she tried hide it with an embarrassed grimace, “hey stop being all emotional on me, geez! I’m fine.”

Danny knew she was lying. Just like him before her and Arianna before Danny. None of them were *‘fine’*. ‘Fine’ was such a hollow excuse for what any of them were.

“No, you’re not. This isn’t fine, none of us are fine and I don’t know if anyone of us will ever be fine…but I like to make it up to you, Dani and help you to get back on track. I wanna make it right,” he said and sent her a determined look, “so don’t leave ever again.”

She looked at him for a second and a little voice in his head told him that he could never keep that promise and she would never trust him to either. That no matter what he did he would never be able to keep anyone safe.

Not her, not his friends, not Arianna and not Amity Park. The dark thought vanished like smoke as Dani buried her face in his chest and hugged him tight.

“Okay,” she said strained and didn’t say anything for a while. Danny didn’t really trust his voice either and just held her close. He would do for as long as she needed him to.

-

Dani was the first to let go and Danny snorted, as she blew her little red nose in his shirt and left a sticky mark.

“Thanks Danny,” she said and Danny helped her up from the swing. They both started walking back to Fenton Works without a word. Both of them had just caught the sight of the stars and walked in comfortable silence.

Danny couldn’t quite describe it, but he kind of felt in synch with Dani. He didn’t have to fill out the silence or make pressured smalltalk to hang out with her.

He had no idea what was going on in her head, but there was something in this comfortable silence that just spoke louder than words. Both just kind of *knew*.

They were halfway home, when Dani turned to him with wide eyes and adventure in her voice, “let’s go to Wisconsin.”

Danny had thought about the exact same thing, but one thing was thinking about it and another thing was…well.

“I don’t think that’s a good idea, Dani,” he replied and scratched his neck, “Sam and Tucker are probably a sleep right now and I’m kinda waiting for Fright Knight to show up any minute now.”

“But we could just leave some duplicates and take the portal ourselves!” she pressed on with shining blue eyes. Danny wondered silently if those insane puppy eyes was the reason he always got away with stuff on his own.

Man those eyes were blue.

He silently wondered if Danny had any idea how stunning she actually looked. Danny had never actually thought of himself as handsome or anything like that – maybe as Phantom after the girls at school started worshipping posters of his ghost-half – but as Fenton? Not Really.

But looking at his sixteen-year-old female clone now, made him

wonder if he could even had outdueled a chick like Paulina back in the days. The combination of those big blue eyes, raven-black tresses, pink lips and narrow waist made Dani more than model worthy.

Was he more attractive as a girl? Maybe? He knew older women had a thing for him, but somehow, he doubted that the cuteness his clone possessed had the same effect in the form of a male.

Even in the baggy clothing and boyfriend-jeans, she was a girl most guys with a working libido would turn their heads after on the street. Danny suddenly felt cold. The thought of Dani on the street like this opened up a whole new world of worry on his part.

Girls like Dani – superpowers or not – would not be safe on the street. Had she ever been called out on the street? Harassed? Attacked? His will to protected just got a whole new level and added to his determination of protecting her from harm.

“Please?” she continued in a childish tone that just added a whole new dimension of persuasion on top of her cuteness, “we have taken Vlad on our own before and we could get your halfa out in less than an hour. I say go Phantoms!”

Danny kind of liked that plan. If they left a great number of duplicates to confuse Skulker and Fright knight, no one would know they had sneaked of to Vlad’s castle.

It was risky of course, but then again…taking risks was kinda Phantom’s trademark and two phantoms added out the minus of this equation, right?

“Okay,” he finally said and Dani changed form with a shout.

“Going ghost!”

Danny laughed at that and changed without a sound, “nice, but if we’re going to do this, it has to be stealthy and fast – that means no battle-cries to.”

Dani nodded eagerly and made the sipper motion over her mouth. Danny shook his head by that – was she just like that or had he been like that back then? – and cheated with a head start as they raced for

Fenton Works and the ghost portal.

Chapter 5

Notes for the Chapter:

> Hey guys - sorry i didn't post yesterday as i usually do - a party got in the way
> anyway, hope you forgive me and enjoy despite the delay
> Ready for some meddling minutes anyone?

The timekeeper of the ghost zone and worlds was in a good mood.

He was rarely nowadays, but the dimension in front of him had taken all the twists and turns as he had hoped it would and he couldn't help but hope it would stay that way for a while. He hadn't been this well entertained in a long time.

Well…there was a couple of times where young Phantom would drop by to amuse him in the past.

The last five times had been to travel back a day or two in time, because he had come up with some sick comeback on one of his enemies' battle banter, he'd wished he come up with at the time and now could.

The rest of the time the young halfa would visite him to get away from other humans and take a nap in his tower, while Clockwork made his work and observed the worlds.

It always made the ancient ghost happy to see how much the young boy had prospered with his powers and continued to stay on the path of goodness.

The only thing he wouldn't mind the halfa growing out of was the tiresome amount of time-related puns Phantom seemed to make up just for his sake.

You had to love that boy.

Danny Phantom were constantly moving closer and closer to one of his many destinies and now that his female counterpart was with him, Clockwork were almost certain that this dimension would proceed exactly as he had for foreseen when he traded it from that other Clockwork.

The Observants had been pleased to see the four halfas divided and the two males fighting. They didn't see, like the timekeeper, the many coves and turns circumstances could make and saw only the final goal, in which they would destroy the halfa race for good.

Clockwork couldn't do anything to prevent that practically outcome of the future, as it was out of his hands, but he could influence and grafting the small changes that could change the circumstances in the long run.

But unfortunately not the final result.

Clockwork pulled one of the many screens and portals to him and regarded it again. Watched closely as Danny Phantoms final hour in this world unfolded before Clockwork.

The final fight was over and Danny Phantom stared into the core that itself was the ghost zones beating soul and was engulfed in the maelstrom of deadly pale light, that obliterated everything it came in contact with.

The old timekeeper had only escaped being engulfed himself and become destroyed by the same light, due to the fact that the Observants had wanted to set an example for the rest of the supernatural world.

As the youngest of the original five dimension keepers, the others had protected him to the very last and he had stood as the last standing on the battlefield, as the Observants had advanced into glory.

The others had been led away to face their execution and Clockwork had believed himself to be doomed to follow them, but the Observants had apparently had other plans for him.

He would serve them as a keeper of time and live on, as a testament

to their mercy and benevolence towards the rest of the ghost world.

He would continue to serve his original purpose as a timekeeper, but now under their control and to the timekeeper's great anger and shame – as their bound slave.

There were no slave collars that could bind him, no magic that could control him and no artifact that could imprison him, but as a ghost he was he ruled by his nature.

He had screamed in pain as they scarred his core with their lights and turned a bleeding line across his face to show his new status as a slave. The pain had almost destroyed him, but they needed him alive to avoid a second revolt and he was brought back to its existence by brutal force.

It was a process that had changed him and in his mind and bleeding core, he had wanted to crease to exists. He had stood guard over time for many centuries and millennia without being able to find the same joy in his profession as before.

Where it had previously been a material he could reshape and control, just as a human could move a string instrument to make it sing, time was now a firm material and locked in front of him.

Unbendable and lost to its slow pace of meaninglessness. Unapproachable and led down in a long existence, out of his hands and wishes.

It pained him more than any prison to stand as a simple observer like this and many a time had he despised himself for turning away from the screens, when time went on without him and fell into places that he could have lead it away from.

His darkest hours had been when the Observants had sought him out and forced him to influence the time on their selfish commandments.

Clockwork had considered the task of Danny Phantom as just another humiliation from his overlord's side and just moved in to do his dreadful job as always, when something had suddenly changed.

Instead of falling into the same pattern of happenings as Clockwork

and the Observants had grown used to, Danny Phantom had broken all rules and decided to cheat on his test, despite all Clockworks intervention.

At first it had annoyed Clockwork.

Phantom was going against all he had foreseen and continued to roll down the path to evil despite warnings and signs – his signs!

Clockwork had been shocked as the halfas had followed him into his own tower, a clear rebellion to time itself and challenged him openly, despite the ridiculousness of it all.

The old time keeper had been ready to just end him and make the job easy for himself by killing the halfa, when Phantom and his friends had broken one of the Observants most essential rules and jumped into his own future.

Creating great time tampering.

It was at that moment that Clockwork had realized the beauty of it all and lost his anger. A young boy, not even grown into human adulthood or ghost powers, had openly rebelled against him, the Observants and everything they stood for.

This little halfa wasn't even an ounc of what Clockwork was capable of, but where Clokwork had fallen, this simple half-ghost had stood his ground.

Danny Phantom had taken time into his own hands.

And as a doorway to a new insight, Clockwork had found himself slowly waking from his daze and seen clearly. For the first time in a long time, he had discovered something unexpected and out of the balanced ordinarily.

The ghost zone was changing.

The time of changes had come and with that the halfas.

In the time that followed after he took up the responsibility of the young halfa, Timekeepers from other alternative dimensions had

approached him and told him the stories of their own encounters with these curious halfas.

No matter where Phantom went he wrecked time and balance, changed his fate despite the Observants rules and sometimes even without the help of the timekeeper of his dimension.

Of course, this change in fate and time wouldn't go unnoticed and many a dimension had called an uproar amongst the Observants.

And while those balance-loving eyeballs had made their meetings to find a way to crush the halfas without damaging time, he and the rest of the timekeepers had meet in secret and made their own thought of the matter.

And if anything, those meeting had taught him something important. The Observants could hurt him and take his freedom – but they couldn't do without him. Not if they wanted the zones godwill.

Clockwork had verified this new understanding by working against his captors for the first time in millennium.

Rescuing the boy from his own destruction, instead of destroying him to prevent his dark future as Dark Phantom, hadn't just a violation of the Observants orders – it was an open anarchy.

An anarchy he had won by simple wordplay and just to sweeten the affair, he had even gained a little more control from the collision.

Danny Phantom, human and ghost, specter and hero, had come under his care and provided the old ghost with more liberties than he had owned previously.

He had guided the boy through space and time and stood guard over him to follow his way to one of his many fates, and it had filled Clockwork with a certain sense of pride to see his protégé unfold over the years.

Phantom was a symbol of changing in the world of ghosts and even though Clockwork couldn't fight, he could lead Danny Phantom to his own small victories and soon further than that.

But he wasn’t the only Phantom who stood under his protection now. He felt more than saw Dark Phantom stand behind him and the heat from the other specters core, could probably be sensed even by human beings.

When Danny and Vlad's cores originally had fused, a more fire-based power spectrum had developed from the older halfa’s power arsenal and Dark had gained cold fire powers next to his electricity.

Danny's ice powers had been suppressed in favor of the dominating heat, but if Dark wished for it, he could take advantage of its more water-based powers, in the form of steam or mist.

The world Conqueror and annihilate at his side had observed the tower's many screens and portals with a certain interest and passivity.

Clockwork did have some suspicion that the other might had planes of taking one of the dimension to continue his rampage, but so far it hadn’t been the case.

Dark followed his younger self with a concentrated expression and interrupted only this almost meditative state to talk with Clockwork or lie down one of the tower's beams.

Clockwork had told him with amusement, that he looked like a large cat as he lay up there, but it hadn’t seemed to bothering Dark to be compared to a lazy feline.

At least not anymore.

The timekeeper doubted that he could influence or change the other ghost to part with his destructive ways, but as long as he was with Clockwork and continued to stay close to him, it was impossible to see his future clearly and say anything with certainty.

Again the sweet curse and blessing of not being able to foresee his own future of things happening around his own person. And he planned to make Dan very close to his person.

Very close.

That was the fascinating about Clockwork's own future. It was so

unpredictable.

-

Dark Phantom – Dan by simple, but not preferred mention – watched the screens from reasons he no longer himself fully understood.

To observe was usually not his style – hell, he couldn't remember a time when he had just been a spectator for anything. To observe meant to create something or stay passive.

People who observed usually had an idea of watching something unfold, develop or just happen in front of them, with or without their simple influence.

Dark Phantom had never been someone to just watched from a distance. His nature commanded him to take part in the events, be in its midst and likely in middle of something destructive, where he himself was in full play and controlled the process.

Never just watching from the sideline.

Dark groaned as he watched how Danny saved yet another innocent pedestrian from one of Skulker's arrows and was hailed by his faithful admires around him on the street.

"Does that loser never get tired of playing hero?"

Clockwork laughed at him, but he had long since learned that the old ghost never laughed at anyone in order to mock them. He just found everything around him – that wasn't a liquid eye – fascinating and amusing in some way or another.

The old time keeper snet him a humored glance, "you don't begrudge your own past much, do you know, Dan?"

"I have told you, it's Dark," he scowled threatening. Most would have backed out by now to the sight of his dominant figure, blazing hair and glowing red eyes. But this was obviously not just anybody.

This was Clock-fucking-work. Master of freaking time. Apparently, he didn't get scared by jack-shit.

The sassiest ghost to ever have survived to stand before – and then walk away from a meeting with Dark Phantom. Dark rolled his red eyes.

"I don't begrudge weaker creatures anything. The little twit is almost twenty and still haven't even reached a third part of my level when it comes to strength or powers. Why should I begrudge him anything? He uses only his mediocre powers for *goood."*

"If I recall correctly that was originally words spoken by Vlad Masters," came it with an amused lisp from the timekeeper and Dark felt the part of him that was Plasmius stir.

"Maybe the cheesehead was right, or perhaps you didn't foresee that?" Dark grinned, using Clockwork's own weak spot against him. You didn't have to be a genius to figure out that the Master of Time couldn't predict anything in his own tangible proximity.

All you had to do was hanging around him long enough to put the little pieces together. His irritation when the Observants arrived, his fear of Dark – his confusing, when Dark suddenly said something unpredictable.

It amused Dark that he had found something to annoy the other with and he got an idea.

"Hey, predict this!"

Clockwork didn't had time to stop him with his staff. Dark's claw made a fast move through the air and decapitated the ghost in a matter of seconds. The head disappeared into nothing, while the body stood still.

A second later, the timekeepers familiar head and face reappeared as if nothing had happened. The older ghost switched to his child form and crossed his little arms in annoyance.

"How long do you plan on fooling around this way, Dan? This is the thirty-two time you have tried to kill me and I think we both know you won't succeed by simple decapitating. I'm no simple ghost. And I think we both know by now, that you just doing this for kicks or

closure."

“Oh? So you want me to get close to you?” Dark teased and showed the other his fangs.

Clockwork smirked by the mix of threat and flirt, “you never know, Dan. It’s true, I can’t predict anything in my own presence as long as I’m caged in this tower, just like the Observants can’t see me or I them, but I think you will come to learn that living for a long time, gives you some other ways of foreseeing things and predict its unfolding.”

That was true. Clockwork couldn’t predict what would happen in his own tower, but he did have a certain knowledge and ability to predicted the other’s every move. It both amused and annoyed Dark to no end.

It reminded him of dogs chasing cars – not that he was anything like such lower creatures.

... But just like dogs chasing cars without knowing what they would do with one when they finally caught one, Dark still weren’t fully aware of what exactly he would do with Clockwork if he finally struck a claw into him.

The most natural thing was for him to kill him of course. Destroy him to the despicable and take his staff and subsequently leave his tower in burning ruins. The usual. There was a system to this and it was a system Dark were more than familiar with.

To destroy made sense, to annihilate was a goal toward the next step. To rule over the burning ruins and wipe out all life was his obsession, his desire and most importantly – his purpose.

So why did he hesitate with the idea of killing the Master of Time?

What is my purpose now? Dark pushed the question out of mind and flew up to the beam he had made to his new haunt.

He didn’t know why he went up here, but if he had to guess, it was probably because Phantom always had owned a strong need to be up under the stars and Plasmius had his eternal need to be able to look

down on others from a more strategic higher point of view.

Clockwork had cast a brief glance up at him before returning to his screens and eternal observation, leaving Dark to do as he pleased for now.

It wasn't uncommon for Dan to just interrupted or end a conversation this way, but it had happened more than usual and he no longer knew whether this was a good development or not.

Well, normally the term 'good for him' meant heading into something destructive or prospectively.

This didn't felt like prospectively – it felt as if he was constantly going backwards. Running around in a ring, like a trapped animal, waiting for something ... but what?

Freedom?

The old fool had taken it from him, with or without the fucking thermos and although it felt good to be out, it changed nothing. The urge to kill resurfaced. It came with small intervals like an old wound that scratched or the feeling of hunger.

A craving.

He wasn't afraid to kill the timekeeper, far from it. The side of him that was controlled by Phantom had never been afraid of a challenge and it lay deeply and stubbornly in him to fight, even though the odds were against him or interchangeably with certain death.

It was Plasmius that held him back. Plasmius sense of logic and strategy told him that he would have greater chances of success if he didn't allow himself to get the better of his foolish daring and waited for an actual chance.

The two powerful characters' origins – contradicting or not – had always given him what he wanted and made Dark invulnerable.

Made him Invincible.

The perfect destructor.

Powerful.

Clockwork was a powerful opponent, but he knew he could handle him if he was smart enough and made a plan – but then again…he didn't really felt like it. It puzzled him, nagged at him, did things with him that in some strange way felt like ... feelings.

Which were impossible, since all his human tendencies and nature had been killed together with his human half.

If Dark closed his eyes, he could still hear the gurgling sound of his own human self, who fought weak and desperate against the two hands that had been locked around his thin neck and squeezed without mercy...

"Try getting rid of this, Danny," Dark snarled and pressed his thumbs on the windpipe instead of the veins. Prolonging the suffering.

"Pha-hatom…plea-ase… no…!" Danny wheezed and tried to claw at his gloves in blind fear and desperation. Twisting and struggling to get free under him.

"Phantom no! Stop it! Let him go!" Vlad screamed and tried to get to them, only to meet Dark's shield. Banging on it to make him stop – as if a human could stop him.

It hadn't said 'plop' as he had thought it would, despite the human's eyes bulging and blood collecting around the edges of those sky-blu orbs, but the wet cracking sound had been satisfactory enough. The first life in the line of countless of humans and Dark had never been able to get enough.

There had never been enough lives to take. Enough cities to burn or countries to leave in ruins, enough brutal or morbid ways to force the last spark of life out of his victims – Never. Really. Enough.

It was the same kind of hunger that ravaged him now, but not of the same caliber or form. Dark wanted something from Clockwork – but what exactly?

He knocked it out of his head and placed his head on the back of his broad arms, as he stared up at the countless cogs, beams and bells

above him. To be removed from his own dimension had left him in a new strange situation and everything that was new could change.

And who knew. Perhaps he could take a break from the world for once and sit back to enjoy the show.

Hell, it was almost ironic – the earth and the ghost zone was heading towards its own destruction, and he hadn't even lifted as much as a finger in that future.

And this time Danny Phantom wouldn't be able to stop it.

Chapter 6

Notes for the Chapter:

> Hey Guys
> I'm going to a Changeling larp tomorrow, so I won't be able to post on schedule, so that's why I'm giving it to you today
> nice huh?
> hope you enjoy and leave a comment if you feel like it

The castle of Wisconsin had once been the home of the first self-proclaimed overlord of the region's dairy production and an edifice creation made by the landowner and self-made businessman; Norman Masters.

The castle's old authentic cobblestones and wooden beams had been imported from a decayed manor back in England, where the Masters family had its roots and used as foundation and frame for this new more modern estate of its time.

The castle had been completed in 1890, the same year Norman Masters left his metaphorical throne and handed it and its legacy to his son and heir; Kingo Masters – "King" among peers.

During the years, it became common practice among the locals to mention the castle's owner as "Mr. King", or simply "the King", since the man's durings and admirations suited that of a monack by american standard.

This was only further settled when the newspapers of Wisconsin promoted the castle's final completion in 1895 and King's breakfast was sweetened an extra bit as he read the surprising – but no less flattering – headline on the front page of Wisconsin Dells Event:*'Wisconsin Dairy King'*.

The title that had started as a joke had ended up being an existing title of the Master family ever since. The title had been embraced

greatly by the young Victor Masters, son and grandson of the castle's creator Norman Masters.

Victor had gone as far as to have a tailormade robe, crown and scepter made as a permanent addition to his wardrobe, which was orthodox, but no one would or dared to take this little wit from the man.

The castle and its 'king' made both business opportunities and drew tourism in Wisconsin and so people would look past the silly cheese crown and ice-cone scepter, and allow the man to act as some strange European royal.

After Victor's death, the equipped were passed on to his son; Harold Masters, but this heir had owned a more…*unobtrusively* nature compared to his father and only used the robe, crown and scepter once, when he where sitting for his traditional dairy king painting.

As soon as the paint had dried, the equipment had been packed away in the attic and afterwards ruined when the castle was destroyed (the first time) with it and many other family artifacts and art.

Danny and Dani Phantom passed the blond man's painting without knowing about any of this and it was doubtful whether any of them would have owned any real interest in gaining this knowledge either.

The only thing Danny noted, was the fact that the man may have been a relative of Vlad, as they both had the same hairstyle and long aristocratic face. It never occurred to him that the painting might could have been Vlad Masters' father himself.

Danny scuffed and considered drawing a mustache on the painting, but forgot all about his childish urges, when Dani walked into a vase and Danny had to catch it mid-falling to keep it from smashing against the carpet and alarming the sleeping castle.

Dani blushed in embarrassment, but Danny just put it back without a sound and showed her with gestures that it was okay.

Dani had already proved herself more than worthy of this mission, as she had helped him evade the massive ghost/human force field

around the site and without her knowledge of its composition, Danny would still had been outside trying to figure its mechanisms out and probably messed up great time.

He knew it would have gone two times faster if Tucker had been here, but this was a spontaneous half-ghost mission slash cousin bonding-exercise, so the humans would have to sit this one out.

The fact that they had been forced to endure a massive force field, was already a good sign in Danny's opinion. That meant that this place was worth guarding and there was something here that Vlad wanted to keep from entities that were either humans or ghosts – or both.

The trip to Wisconsin was a four-day drive if you took the trip in the human world by car, while the distance between the Fenton and Plasmius portal were half an hour in speeder.

Danny had hoped to just enter Vlad's lab through the portal, but apparently the old Fruitloop had seen that for miles and sealed the portal with all the security that money could buy and craft.

Danny had been forced to be creative and taken the speeder into human airspace instead. Lucky for them his mother had rebuild its engines and Danny had taken the chance to "test fly" them for her.

The speeder had almost functioned as a rocket and cleaved the civil air like a hot knife through butter.

Making the trip in a total one hour.

Danny had parked the speeder behind a red barn a kilometer from the castle and they had taken the last distance by ghost power alone. The castle had raised ominous in its gold, white and green signature colors and almost seemed to pierced the sky with its pointy towers.

The raven-haired teenager was surprised Vlad had even bothered to rebuilt this place.

He had thought the man would have abandoned the site after it had been turned into a ruin for the third time, but appeared money knew no bounds and a castle could be rebuilt in record time these days.

It was in Danny's opinion just as ugly and gloomy as the previous two and he couldn't wait to find Arianna, suck Vlad up in their thermos and get the hell outta here.

Danny had enough experience with Vlad Masters to know the man had the ignorant idea that he could keep his secret laboratory 'secret' and sought the castle's underground.

They had encountered a force field in the library and study chamber, which should have come as no surprise to Danny since Vlad insisted on keeping his library and office 'private' as well.

Who had more than one library anyway?

"We start tearing down walls now?" Dani asked hesitantly, looking for the best available wall where a force-field generator could be hiding, but Danny just shook his head and led her to the library's wide fireplace.

"There's no reason to – see?" he replied and showed her an almost invisible line running throughout the fireplace shelf and chimney.

Danny grabbed the first and most precious looking value on the mantelpiece and sure enough – the gold trophy could be opened and revealed a large red button.

“Subtle as a flying mallet,” Dani said sarcastically and Danny gave her a grin.

"Just my words."

They both drew back a bit as the fireplace divided into two, slide to each side and revealing a downward staircase. Danny took the lead and began the descent into the silent underground castle.

Danny expected to reach an opening to a laboratory, but instead found a heavy metal door and coding system. Danny deadpannede. He should have known it would be too easy just to think Vlad would rebuild everything as it was, without some kind of improvement.

Dani tried to get through the door without success and Danny examined the panel. It demanded a password.

He tried *'Vlad Masters'*, but was denied access. Danny bit his lip. If this system was based on a lock that activated an alarm after five incorrect attempts, they would really be on the bucket. He wished Tucker were here for the second time that night and tried again.

'Little badger'

The system denied him entry and Dani gave him a look. Danny blushed, "don't look at me like that. He calls me that sometimes – don't people usually use passwords based of their children and pets, or some crap like that?"

Dani just shrugged and Danny tried again with his teeth buried in his lip, *'Maddie Masters'*.

Danny thought for a second that he had hacked it, but was again denied access again. Dani pushed past him, "why 'Maddie'? I thought he was over your mother?"

"He is, it's just ..." Danny's voice died out.

The only reason he had typed 'Maddie Masters', was because Jazz had discovered that access-code back during her short resided with Vlad – it had been a lucky guess of course, but later she admitted to him her guess had been based on his own code tendencies.

Apparently, he and Vlad share a certain obsession with unattainable women, and both of them had proved stupid enough to dedicate their passwords to said women. Danny had changed all his password after that and delete all entries named *'Paulina Fenton'* from his systems.

Although it nagged at him that he could have anything in common with the fruitloop, maybe there was something about it. Danny had changed his all his passwords to *'Sam Fenton'*, which could only mean that Vlad had changed his to ...

'Arianna Masters'.

The code flashed green and Danny breathed a sigh of relief. Dani pressed up to him expertly as a new panel took the keyboard place. Danny lost his jaw, "seriously!? An iris and *voice scanner!?*"

Danny’s outburst was almost caught in his throat as his ghost-sense triggered itself and the same cold steam escaped Dani's lips.

"Who's dare?"

Both Phantoms turned around to meet the sight of a young woman in a maid uniform, standing in the stairway opening with broom and bucket in hand. Danny was going to tell Dani she should make herself invisible, when he realized the maid had green hair and eyes.

Clearly a ghost.

His theory was confirmed when the girl took off from the staircase step and phased through the library's ceiling to escape. None of them needed any agreement before both followed her and raced to reach the screaming maid.

"Help! Help!" she screamed and threw her cleaning equipment after them.

Danny dodged the bucket and reached to grab the ghost maid, preventing her from awaken the whole castle in her frenzy, but the little ghost was faster than expected.

Danny’s fingers found empty air, making him stumble and Dani yelped as she tumbled directly into Danny and phased through him to avoid a collision.

Danny almost got brain-freeze and felt the short urge to scratch his core, feeling like if someone had just shoved it down into ice water.

"Help! Thieves! Thieves on de groun' floor!" the maid screamed with a heavy Irish accent, shooting down the corridor with the two Phantoms in tail and was finally stopped as they tackled the ghost into a new living room.

They all landed in a big pile on a convenient placed couch and struggled wildly in a war of ghost-rays and sprawling limbs to get the upper hand. The maid’s wild screams were smothered as Danny slammed a hand over her mouth and held her firmly.

"Shut up! We aren’t here to fight with you, so be quiet please!"

“That’s right!” Dani added pumped and flew up into the woman's face, "tell us where you keep the halfa and we’ll spare your life!"

"Dani!" Danny said shocked, "we're not going to kill her – it's not that kind of mission!"

Dani seemed disappointed and pouted while Danny tied the ghost with ecto-ropes and placed her on the messy couch.

"Listen, just tell us where Vlad keeps Arianna and no one gets hurt, okay?"

She looked frightened at them and sought the room for an escape. Danny felt a little ashamed as he noticed her green bob was tousled and her uniform wrinkled, even a bruise forming over her left eye.

He had the feeling that this mission had gone completely out of control, but they were here so they might as well carry it out till the end.

"Arianna,” he tried again and lifted his hand to around his chin, “she's yay high, either pink or brown hair and switches between three and two eyes. Looking twenty, but is really a thirty-year-old woman in disguise – where is she?"

The maid stammered and had to make a second attempt to find the use of her voice, “Oi d-don’t kn-now waaat yer p-people i-is blatherin' ab-aboyt! waaat w-woman? Mr. Masters don’t 'owl any woman here!”

Danny weren’t that skilled when it came to reading others, but something told him that the maid told the truth. She seemed terrified and would probably tell them everything she knew – that is, if she even knew anything at all.

"Vlad kidnapped a woman three months ago – does he have a sealed area or infirmary down in the lab? A place he could keep a prisoner ... a dungeon maybe?"

She shook her head, now more astonished than in fearful. She gave Danny a long look as if he were a complete lunatic, "a dungeon? Wat decade do yer people tink dis is? De 1400 century? Ah please."

"But is there?" Danny repeated.

The maid straightened her back and gathered up all the dignity that her tatty appearance could muster, " Mr. Masters 'owl naw prisoners in 'is gaff an' 'as not used 'is laboratory or castle since last year. An' now oi 'ill ask yer ter leave, dis is private property."

“You don’t get to make demands, bitch,” Dani replied with an arrogance that reminded Danny of Vlad for a second, “he asked you a question – where is she?”

The maid gave Dani a foul look, but brighten up as she caught sight of something behind their shoulders, “Temple!”

A ghost ray was fired and both Phantoms jumped into cover behind the couch as the fifth party joined the little gathering. A huge ghost dressed up in a white chef uniform and hat, rushed in and stared at them with clear venom.

Dani answered the fire and the bald ghost took cover behind the doorframe with a growl.

The maid jumped out of the couch and ran to him with a yell, “Oi 'av been anythin' but killed an' raped!”

“Oh no you don’t!” Dani yelled and snatched the thermos from Danny’s back holster. The little maiden screamed as she was caught by the beam and sucked into the soup container.

The chef gasped, “Daisy!” and both his hands flared up with dark-green ecto-energy. Danny and Dani left their cover, as an army of sharp kitchen equipment flew into the living room and turned the couch into a pincushion.

Danny snatched back the thermos and ignored the muffled screaming from inside.

“Dani, what the hell!?”

“They’re gonna tell Vlad we were here if we don’t stop them,” she retorted and turned intangible as a meat cleaver came flying though her head, “we can let them go later, but we have to keep this as a

stealth mission, right? Right!?”

Danny didn’t like this, but had to admit she were right. The little maid wasn’t exactly dangerous or anything, but if Vlad found out they had been snooping in his castle, they could risk him moving Arianna further away.

He jumped out from his hideout, “hey chef! Try this dish!”

The ghost ducked as Danny’s green ecto-disk slammed into the doorframe and sliced into a large part of the wall to. The ghost dodged the other disks and left his cover for a fast attack.

All the knives and sharp objects followed him like a swarm and he threw up several plates and cutting board as a shield, as Danny started using his ghost ray. A large rolling pin smacked Danny in the face and Dani took his place.

The chef was strong, but not of the fast caliber like them and Dani found her opening and started punching him with her glowing hands.

Danny jumped in before her as a meatgrinder came flying and was going to shield them both, when Dani decided to go solo and go for the ghost again.

The chef had seen her coming, but she surprised both him and Danny, when she didn’t go for a fist attack, but instead turned her powers against the flying knives hurled towards her.

Danny’s eyes widened as he watched her telekinetic powers trumped the ones of the chief ghost and Dani sent his own knives back at him. The knives nailed his white uniform to the wall and he yanked furiously to get free.

Danny grabbed his thermos and sucked him up before he would remember he could go intangible and escape.

Dani threw a fist in the air, "yes! I did it! Did you see that!? Did you see me there!?"

Danny nodded overwhelmed, "wow, I have never used my telekinetic abilities that way before."

"Really? Then what do you use them for?"

Danny got a brief flashback of himself playing video games in his bed and stretched out a lazily arm. A cola came flying to him and he took a sip without moving his eyes from the screen.

"... uhm, that doesn't matter right now. What matters is that we are stocked with two prisoners now and we still haven't come one step closer to finding Arianna. Great…what now?"

“We could threat the vultures?” she suggested and pointed to the three specters floating above them.

“Hey! Quit stealing the servant – ve’ve haven’ve had our supper yet!” the leader with the red fez said tiredly, “and everyone knows the butler isn’t going to make it.”

“The gardener and driver still hasn’ve come back from vacation either and ve’ve need our meals on time,” the next vulture continued and was backed up by the one with the black glasses.

“Ve’ve 2010 years old – have some respect for our needs!”

Dani rolled her eyes, “we pay our respect at your funeral if you don’t tell us where Vlad keeps his prisoner.”

Danny gave her a worried glance, “Damn, Dani. What did the streets do to you?...wait, you haven’t been to prison, have you?”

If she had, he would have fucked up worse than he thought.

“No,” she answers with that kind of long tired sigh, that only a teenager could produce with such drama and eyesrolling, “but if you want results, you better get ready to get dirty hands – like right now.”

Dani backed her words up with an ecto-blast right at the vultures. The birds yelled in pain and spread out in order to attack them from three sides. Danny stood back to back with his clone and made his hands flare.

“Okay, I get it! – but could you turn down for the Vlad vibes? It’s

creepy."

She turned her head with an assaulted glare, "I'm nothing like Vlad! You take that back!"

"I will as soon as you stop talking all Fruitloop and shit!"

Dani and Danny forgot almost all about the vultures and fought them more on autopilot and reflexes than anything, while they yelled and glared at each other.

"I'm nothing like him!" Dani yelled and grabbed one of the vultures by the throat without thinking. Danny just gave her look, "are you kidding me? You just need the snack curses and you can call yourself *Vlani.*"

She jumped him and the vultures stared a little confused as the two Phantoms rolled around on the floor, fighting and pulling each other's clothes and hair like angry children.

"Children these days, so veird," the leader noted and the others nodded.

"Remember 'he time vhen children vere supposed to work in the fields and not going around half-killing 'hemself's and rise as clones?" the orther asked and flew off with the other two to the abandoned thermos.

The one with the round beak grabbed the lid, "quit babbling and get the chef out. Our shov begins in an hour and I can't vatch vithout food."

"Ah yas, *The Duchess Approves* is on the channel five and I've read Sturly Stembleburgiss vill've play the Duchess."

Danny and Dani continued their fighting undisturbed, as the three vultures struggled with the thermos and shared their aversion for the movie character; the irascible coxswain Saunterblugget Hampterfuppinshire.

Danny hold his clone out of his range, with a hand on her face and forgot all about her little flying fists and angry yells, when he noticed

the vultures, “hey, get away from that!”

The vultures ignored him and clawed at the lid to get it open.

“Maybe ve’ve get to finish it this time, since the boss is all stocked in his office,” the leader continued hopeful. The one with the glasses finally got the claw on it and removed the lid – only to get them all sucked up in the thermos by accident.

Dani and Danny stopped fighting, as all three vultures disappeared into the container. They picked it up and shared a look.

Danny turned it in his hand raised eyebrow, “wow, they more stupid than I remember…wanna keep this between you and me, and tell the others we caught them fair and square?”

“Sure, ain’t first time I lied for ma’ cousin.”

Danny tousled her hair with a grin and Dani smiled, “so…Vlad’s office?”

Chapter 7

Notes for the Chapter:

> Hey guys
> sorry for not updating yesterday - some heavy shit got in the way
> Hope you like it anyway and comment if you feel like it

Mr. Lancer clear his throat as the last students walked into class and searched his papers, “alright people, before we start history class today, I have been informed very resent and unprepared by the principal, that we have a transfer student moving to our school today.”

He eyed the new student with both confusion and anticipation.

“Apparently, she also Mr. Fenton’s cousin third removed. Please come up here, Miss. Fenton and introduce yourself.”

Dani smiled bright and jumped up from her seat next to Danny. He had been stunned when he found out Jazz had used Dani’s overshadowing powers to get her signed up for Casper high and into Danny’s class nevertheless.

Jazz had actually made impact on her words of them getting Dani back to civilization and signed Dani up for Casper High – and of course she hadn’t taken a second to discuss it with Danny and just jumped into it head first as she always did.

She had tried explained to Dani that she probably was too young for Danny’s class, but on the others hand, the young halfa would learn better if she had someone to help her, since she’d never stepped into an education institution before.

Dani didn’t really know anything about that, but this was all new and a little exciting, so she was up for anything. School always looked amazing on TV and in the movies – how bad could it be?

Where they gonna sing and dance in the hallway to?

She more jumped than walked up to Mr. Lancer and flashed a confident smile to the class, “sup? I’m Dani – with one ‘n’ and an ‘i’.”

Valeri spit the can of cola she had tried sneaking into class and Danny deadpanned at the table next to her, “oh poop.”

Dani heartily noticed any of them and continued cheery, while secretly reading up from the note Jazz had given her, “I have been homeschooled until now by my parents, but moved here, while they have work out of the states, so this is the first time I’m going to a class, so please take good care of me.”

“Very nice, you can return to your seat, Miss Fenton,” Lancer informed and Dani sat down with a good feeling.

She had introduced herself, made it to class on time and the teacher had called her “Miss.”. Everything had worked out so far.

“And Vlad told me the community school was a waste of time, oh please,” she muttered with a grin.

Two girls turned around and gave her a short glance, before turning back again and started whispering to each other in secrecy. Dani studied them. They looked like the stereotype bimbos from the high school movies, with their slim curvy figures and heavy layer of makeup.

The latino seemed to be the queen-bee between the two of them and the blond nodded eagerly to everything she said – or whispered in this case. Mr. Lancer regained everyone’s attention again with a tapping on the board.

“Nice to see you all so lively this morning, ‘cause guess what? We have a pop-quiz today.”

Danny and everyone else groaned and Dani looked up as a piece of paper was placed in front of her.

“I’ll allow this test to just be a test in your case, Miss. Fenton, but try and make it anyway so I’ll know what to expect from you.”

Dani just nodded eagerly, “okay!”

The teacher continued to hand out the test and Dani flipped her’s to examine the paper, when she felt a light tickling as if someone was watching her and looked to the side.

A dark-skinned girl with long dark hair in small braids and heavy gold jewelries was watching here intensely. Dani returned the favor and cut the connection, when Danny forced her to direct her attention to him again.

“Dani, I thought we agreed on calling you Danielle in here,” he whispered strictly and she rolled her eyes.

“Who cares, I call myself what I want. Whatzya you so afraid of?”

Danny made a little toss with his head and Dani ignored his whispered protests when she just turned back to the girl that had watched her a second before. She was now staring at Danny – clearly more than just pissed off and cracked the pencil in her hand with a ‘snap’.

Danny gulped, “now that she knows I have a half-ghost as a cousin, she’s only one surname away from finding out I’m Phantom – she’s gonna kill me!”

“Why?” Dani asked confused, but was interrupted as Mr. Lancer started to talk again and set a timer. Dani looked around expectantly at the bored students and lighted up as the two chicks in front of her suddenly turned around to her.

“Aren’t you a little too young for this class?” the latino asked and the blond smirked.

“Maybe she’s one of those kid-geniuses that jump grades – what do you take for making others homework, Dani?”

“Let her alone, Star,” Danny interrupted rudely and send the two cheerleaders a tired look, “she’s not going to do your homework, just because she’s the new kid.”

“Don’t be so sure, Danny-boy,” the latino added with a knowing smile

and turned to Dani, “I’m Paulina, wanna go to a party with us tonight? We’re going to a beach with some college boys.”

Dani just smiled, “nah, you and Star is just going to humiliate me in some way to keep up your role as the popular girls at school and make me learn my place. My guess is that you will try and make me do something stupid like skinny-dipping as the only one, or something else that would make he a laughing stock. Really, this plot is driving itself. It’s just a farce girls like you do to hide your insecurities. I’m sure we’re going to sing a duet about it when we get to elect the prom queen at the end of the year.”

The two girls were staring at her flabbergasted, while Danny and the others was fighting the battle of their lives not to break down sobbing from laughter. Their whispering seemed to have been noticed and Lancer smacked his book on the counter.

“Fentons, keep it quiet or leave class.”

Danny scowled but kept quiet and picked up his pen to start on his test. Dani copied him and unpacked her backpack to get her own stuff. She took one look at the paper before humming uncertain, “pisssst, Danny…”

He turned to her and she tapped on the test paper, “what is this for again?”

He sent her a surprised look, “it’s a pop-quiz, you know? To see if we have been studying and following the class. But really, it’s to humiliate use and see if we’re ready for the final test. Something like that.”

“Okay…what’s a final test?”

Danny looked like he was getting a headache and she listened interested and a little disturbed, as he explained the education system for her. That sounded like a lot of wasted time if you asked her.

She wondered if this had all been a mistake.

Clearly, she needed to catch up on a lot of material and studies – and so far, no one had confessed their eternal love to her, started a fight

in class, or made a dance session in the hallway. Lame.

She gave Danny's paper a glance, his writing was tight and in soft cursive, almost a little girly. She snorted and turned back to her own paper.

The teacher up front – what was his name again? Lancer? – had settled down with a book, something called *'how to be ask for a raise – for dummies'*, clearly ignoring the class for the time being.

She had heard the others complain about this particular class – apparently that other halfa had used to teach history a lot more interesting than the current teacher. Danny had told her that Arianna had taken the job out of boredom disguised as a teacher, just like Dani pretended to be a student right now.

She wondered what it would be like to have another halfa as a teacher. Not just as a school teacher, but as a half-ghost mentor.

Dani had known most of her power already by birth as some kind of lower consciousness, the same knowledge that had given her the gift of acting and understanding like a normal twelve-year-old.

Vlad had taught her how to use her abilities shortly, but most of it had just returned to her as if it had been a hidden talent in her.

Vlad had explained loosely to her, that her memories were based on the simulation he had made from Danny, in order to make her and the other clones like him, just without his human memory and apparently dislike for the man.

Vlad was many things, but he had been her teacher and guidance when she first arrived into this world. The way Danny spoke of this other halfa reminded Dani of her own former feeling towards her father.

Maybe this halfa woman would take her under her wings to when they found her?

The feeling of being watched again made Dani return to the mysterious girl on her left. She was watching her again and Dani got the feeling she knew this girl from somewhere, but couldn't exactly

put her finger on it.

Which was weird, 'cause this girl was freaking gorgeous. Those big green eyes and soft dark lips made Dani's mind go wild and her long braids looked soft to the touch. Dani felt her cheeks burn again.

She had to ask Danny about her later.

The girl suddenly dropped her broken pencil and Dani bowed down to get it for her, getting an excuse to get a little closer to her. She felt little butterflies flutter in her stomach when both reached for it and their hands meet.

The moment turned a little weird when a piece of paper was pressed in between her fingers and the girl winked to her. Dani sat up and opened the note under the table, Danny noticed her and read it next to her.

'Meet me after school, behind the gym.'

Danny groaned silently while Dani bit her lip in excitement.

Best. High school. Experience. Ever!

-

"This is bad," Danny said gingerly and both Tucker and Sam shared a worried glance behind him, as they read the note.

Dani on the other hand, was almost jumping with glee beside him and Danny searched the hallway for the genitor's closet, in order to call a short crisis meeting, where they didn't risked stumbling into Valerie or be overheard by any bystanders.

"She has to know by now," he groaned in mental pain and could already feel her fist in his stomach or kick in his groin. She would kill him, that's for sure and now she even knew where he lived…he was as good as toast!

"We find a way out of this," Sam promised, but didn't seemed convinced by her own words.

Tucker snapped his fingers, “maybe we could clear her memory of Dani, if we just –”

“No! We are not calling Desiree in again,” Danny interrupted sternly, “last time I had to search the entire ghost zone to find the ghost of her stupid sheik boyfriend, just to get my wish and clear the school’s memory of the battle royal ghost nightmare and my identity.”

“But it worked,” Tucker whined, “we got everything back to normal after Vlad’s accidently ghost monster outlet and the wish didn’t backfire on us – it’s like the eagles in The Lord of the Rings! The opportunity is right there! Right there!”

“I’m not granting anymore jinni wishes, Tuck. And I don’t have the time anyway – we’re just lucky that the only ones that have to remember that incident is us and that Wes guy.”

A red-haired senior student with freckles stepped out of the crowd of the hallway and spotted Danny with a scowl. Danny groaned, “speaking of the sun – or *moron* in this case. Wes, what do you want?”

The teen grabbed Danny’s shirt and pushed him back into the lockers. He was a lanky tall guy, but as a player in Casper Highs basketball team, he was a lot stronger and sportier, than the red and white sports jacket led on.

“I’m on to you, Phantom,” he scowled and Danny rolled his eyes.

“Oh really? Made a new class presentation about how I’m the ghost kid? Is there a pie chart on this one to? They are the most convincing part, you know.”

Some of the students around them laughed and Wes gritted his teeth in embarrassment. Danny knew he probably shouldn’t rill up the guy, but it was *way* too easy.

Wesley Weston had made himself a name as the school’s crazy ghost theorist, when he had stood up in his class and presented them a free-subject presentation, about ‘why Danny Fenton is Inviso-Bill’.

The kid had been dead serious and Danny had to admit the guy really

had put some observation and effort into that theory. He hadn't even seen Danny transform, just based it on the fact that he and Phantom looked alike and one of them disappeared when the other showed up.

Wes classmates had replied with laughter and Danny had found himself in some sort of ironic limbo the next couple of weeks, where people in school would call him Inviso-Bill for fun and make jokes of asking him to do ghost stuff.

The humiliation only seemed to be the start of Wes Weston's struggle to prove Danny and the ghost boy's relation, and uncover the truth.

Danny had been to stunned at first to do anything about it and soon realized that he didn't had to – this guy was doing it worse for himself all alone. The joke turned lame fast and people lost interested, which just seemed to stir Wes even further and made his obsession almost desperate.

"Am I the only one that sees this!?"

"Oh my god, Wes, just let it go!"

Sam had told Danny to do something about it, but Danny couldn't get himself to ruin it. Wes had started follow him around, spy on him from a bush outside his window and even forced Danny into silly situations in order to catch him transform red handed.

The guy had even started taking pictures of him like some sort of paparazzi and Dany had to admit he had talent and reblogged them from Wes conspiracy blog to his own Phantom-fan blog.

It had been fun and crack for some months, until that day that Vlad had ripped a portal into the zone by accident and released a group of hungry ghost monsters and created havoc. Danny had been in detention with Wes.

After the basketball player had lost his last cool and tried getting Danny to transform by attacking him in the hallway, Mr. Lancer had decided they could spend an hour together, while he had lunch in the teacher's room.

Danny had used the time to draw doodles on his desk, while Wes had

stared at him with clear rage, when suddenly the scream of the students had reached them from the door.

Wes had pointed at the door with a fuming scowl, “oh gee – ghosts is attacking the school and eating people! Where is the great Danny Phantom when we need him!?”

Danny had been ready to just knock the guy out, but then realized the beauty of the whole mess.

No one would ever believe him.

“Hey, Wes, ya totally right.”

He had given Wes a big goofy smile and stared him dead in the eye as he transformed to Phantom. The guy had dropped his jaw and stared in disbelief. Danny gave him a gun finger as he walked for the hallway and phased through the wall, “bye!”

Wes had made a sound of pure agony.

Danny had forgot all about him, when he had received his wish from Desiree and wished for people to forget about the monsters – but not him transforming.

Wes had been a miserable mess the day after the whole thing and desperately begged people to remember and confirmed that he hadn’t turned insane. Poor guy.

Sam grabbed Wes hands and forced him away from Danny, “Wes, let him alone.”

Dani stared from Sam to Wes with clear wonder, “oh wow, a real hallway fight?”

She searched the crowd and found the right person, as she grabbed Mickey on her left, “you! Geek-kid – get a teacher, they always do in movies.”

“But I wanna see Weston get ass-kicked by Manson,” he whined, but ran with a squawk as Dani pounded her fist together with a frown.

“You’re covering him,” Wes continued and pointed at Sam, “your just as much in this as him – why does no one ever question why Foyle and Manson hangs out with both Fenton and Phantom!?”

“Hey,” Tucker added offended, “it could be him hanging out with us, man.”

Dani grabbed Danny and tried pushing him into Wes, “fight! Fight! Fight!”

Wes lost his jaw when he saw her, “the female Phantom! – it’s the girl-ghost that’s following Phantom around town!”

“We don’t have time for this!” Dani insisted, “the teachers on the way and you two haven’t even started throwing punches yet!”

Danny facepalmed and their classmates took pictures of Wes, as Dani deiced Danny was to slow and jumped the baseball player herself. The big gym teacher Tetzlaff appeared out of the crowd a second later and grabbed Wes by the jacked.

He struggled to get free and explain he hadn’t started the fight with a girl, but the teacher didn’t seem to buy it and had to lock his arms in a bone crushing hug, as he trashed to get out of her hold.

“That’s enough, Crazy Wes.”

“I’m Not Crazy!” Wes yelled and tried kicking his way free, “I’ll prove it to you – I’ll prove it to you all!”

They watched as the guy was removed and Dani ran a hand through her messy bangs with shining eyes, “popular girl rivalry, a love confession and hallway fight on my first day? – the movies were right. Are we going to sing about friendship and individuality now?”

“Someday,” Tucker promised her with a little faithful tear in the corner of his eye and followed the others, as the crowd spread and the stream of students continued their merry way through the hallway and education system.

“Come on,” Danny said tiredly and led them outside, “we might as well continue the action outside and get Valerie, now we’re at it.”

“Valerie?” Dani asked confused, “isn’t that the name of –”

Danny walked ahead and turned around the corner to the building of the gym, before he was meet with a fist square in the face. Valerie Grey stood above him with a furious face.

“You got some explaining to do, pal.”

“I can explain!” Danny agreed hastily and crawled backwards as she walked to him. He squeaked as she seized him by the collar and rose him to his feet, “I’m sorry, okay – I should have lied to you, it’s just –”

“Tell me it isn’t true,” she demanded with tears in her eyes as the others ran up to them, “tell me that you’re not the ghost I have hunted and tortured all this time!”

Danny was to stunned to answer and the others could only stare. Valerie shook him violently, almost begging, “tell me it isn’t true! Tell me!”

Danny wanted to. He had fought for this secret for so long and done the impossible to keep the people and loved ones around him, from knowing his state as half-living, that it had become an obsession to him.

He had even prepared for this moment and already made several stories why he wasn’t Phantom.

He could tell her that Dani and Danny Phantom was a pair of his ghost ancestors that had come through his parent’s ghost portal and hung out at his place. That would explain why they both looked like him and why he knew about Valerie’s secret as the Red huntress.

He could tell her that Vlad had created both ghosts as clones of Danny, to get a daughter and half-ghost son from Vlad’s own DNA.

He could tell her that the resemblance was a camouflage ghosts used and took from the first person their saw. Meaning that when they came through the portal Phantom had chosen his by chance and Dani had followed his example.

He could tell her all this and even more clever and better lies, but the truth was…Danny was tired of all the lies.

Tucker had placed his hands over his eyes, while Sam mimed 'no' and shook her head from side to side. Dani was the only one not getting the situation and looked from him to Valerie with concern.

Danny sighed and downcast his eyes, "I'm sorry, Valerie. I'm Danny Phantom."

She released him and placed her hands over her mouth.

"All this time," she whispered with tears streaming down her cheeks, "I…I have shot you, Danny! I have hunted you down almost for three years and even threaten to tortured you! We even dated! How could you do this to me!?"

He really didn't have an answer to that and didn't stop her, when she slapped him across the cheek. He deserved it, he deserved it all. He was surprised, however, when she locked her arms around him and pressed him into a hug.

"Don't lie to me anymore."

He hugged her back with a sigh, "promise".

Both Sam and Tucker shared a worried look and Danny gave them a halfhearted smile. Valerie let go, dried her eyes a little annoyed and crossed her arms, "I think you all have some explaining to do."

"Right," Sam sighed and led them to the parking lot, "I get my car – it's time for us to hide anyway or we'll be getting company by Skulker."

Valerie frowned, "that hunter ghost? If he shows up, I'm gonna show him a piece of my mind and return the whole hunting favor!"

Dani suddenly gasped, "that's where I know you from – you're the Red huntress!"

Valerie froze and smacked a hand over Dani's mouth, before making sure that no one had overheard them, "keep it down would you? If

Phantom can keep it secret, so can you."

"Sorry," Dani grinned, but didn't step away, when Valerie released her, "so you and Danny aren't dating anymore?"

Danny led that slide for now, "Valerie I promise to tell you everything, but right now we have to hide and get some things from last night cleared out –"

"Last night?" Sam and Tucker asked suspiciously and Danny could already tell that this was gonna be difficult to explain.

"Well, yeah…me and Dani visit Vlad's castle last night and found a trace to where Vlad is hiding," he explained sheepishly and pulled the thermos from his bag, "that and three vultures, a cook and a maid…"

That kinda sounded like a children's rhyme…

Sam and Tucker was not amused.

Chapter 8

Notes for the Chapter:

> Hey people!!!
> here's another chapter for ya - hope you like it
> enjoy and comment if you fell like it

A broad sign near the park promoted cheerily a bright headline, side by side with a smiling stereotype couple. *'Amity park – a place to feel safe'.*

This claim was highly challenge, when the innocent male models face was destroyed. A sizzling ecto-beam missed its actually target and the responsible ghost flew through it new hole in the spot the male models face should have been.

Neither hunter or his prey paid much thought to the damage it would cost the taxpayers or commercial company would have to pay and continued the game of cat and mouse.

Skulker straightened up in the air and followed the two Phantoms, while Fright Knight passed him on his horse to get them first, "fight us for your territory or be cowards!"

"Come back here, whelps! You're not behaving as real territory defenders!"

Dani turned her head to send them a mocking face, "your *mom* is not behaving!"

The duplicates led the ghosts further away with inappropriate and childish battle banter, while the real Danny and Dani hid in the playground's yellow tube slide, with Sam Valerie and Tucker.

The tube had turned out to be the most successful hideout, after Skulker discovered their hideout in the changing room of the woman's underwear department last week.

The whole Phantom team (now Valerie included as the newest member and Ghost-getter number 6) had assembled this afternoon, plus Jazz, who was represented on the screen of Tuckers new PDA.

"You sure there was no ghost left to tell Vlad you broke into his castle?" she asked with a concerned voice – or maybe it was just the transmission sound that needed to be updated. Tucker weren't completely sure.

He packed the last Phantom presentation down and closed the tap to their ghost profiles.

Giving Valerie the short version of the case that was Danny Phantom's origins and life, had turned out to be a rather difficult affair and they had all winced, when they had to explain to her that Nightshade and the former history teacher 'Miss. Black' was one and the same.

Valerie had facepalmed, "isn't there a halfa I haven't tried to kill once?"

The whole case of having Valerie as a part of the team felt surprisingly natural and it puzzled Tucker, why they haven't teamed up with her sooner. Having a professional ghost hunter in on finding Arianna could be useful and would surely come as a surprise for Vlad when they stormed his hideout.

But while Tucker's presentation of their situation – in his opinion – had been pure art, Danny's story about how he and Dani had just spontaneously taken a trip to Vlad's castle, needed some explanation.

The tube slide was cramped and Sam nudged Danny and Tucker in order to find a new position that wouldn't give her a crick in the neck, while she had to share the tight space with Valerie. She poked Danny just for second time's sake.

Danny had a lot to explain and the little they had managed to get out of him and Dani, had clearly not been good enough in Sam's opinion. The two ghosts had shared little esoteric glances and gestures hidden throughout the retelling of yesterday night's events and Sam could smell a conspiracy like a hound, but let it slide for now.

Tucker smiled – get it? Because they were in a *tube slide?*

Danny avoided their eyes and hugged his thermos closer to him, "if the vulture's conversation is anything to go by, it seems that everyone else in the castle is on vacation…Is it normal to have only one cook and maid working at a castle?"

"The fact that Vlad even have servants – and all of them being ghosts, is anything but normal," Sam commented and Tucker gave the thermos a brief look.

"A maid you say? In a real french uniform?"

"Focus, Tucker," Sam groaned and Jazz send him dagger eyes.

"You're a tied man now, remember?"

Sam and Jazz gave his enormous diamond ring a nod to emphasize the statement.

"Yeah, nice girlfriend, Tucker," Valerie added kind of impressed and Tucker smiled dreamy as he found a picture of Dora on his PDA. Jazz protested as she was pushed down on the screen and tried hopelessly to regain her space without any success.

Dora's sweet face smiled up at him and Tucker sighed in content.

Dora had continued their relationship, despite the cancellation of their wedding and Tucker still couldn't believe his own luck. Dora had been his dream girl all this time and he had let it go right past him.

She was beautiful, blond, funny, gentle like a princess – which she of course technically was, although appointed president now – interested in his techno gear and wanted a longer relationship with him. Damn.

She even laughed at his jokes. He brushed it off his mental list of Dora quality again. His jokes were hilarious; how could she not laugh at them?

"Anyway," Danny said and made sure that the thermos was not

shaken by the vibration of the children playing on the racks above them, "both the maid and the vultures said Vlad had been away – maybe even since he kidnapped Arianna. Which means the castle isn't the place…"

"But you said the lab was closed and the vultures mentioned his office?" Jazz pressed, once again the victor of the screen space. Tucker sighed, already missing his girlfriend.

"But we have already searched the mayor's office and it's clearly abandoned," Tucker added, "If they were talking about his office at the castle, he would probably have shown or at least defended it. And that's only if you believe the maid weren't lying about him being away in the first place."

"Maybe," Danny replied uncertain and both he and Dani scratched their necks at the same time. Tucker rose an eyebrow as both halfas blew a strand of hair of their faces in unison as well.

Freaky.

"But the servants is actually a good sign," Sam said, thinking out loud, "that they've been on vacation and returned, gotta mean that Vlad's considering taking the castle back into use. I guess this means that we can swipe the foreign hideaway of the list again. Vlad must be keeping her around somewhere nearby, so he can move her there on a short notice."

"Yeah, you should know all about servants," Tucker grinned.

The last time he was at her house to celebrate they had survived another exam along with Danny, Pam Manson had just hired a new housekeeper and the elderly woman had chugged around the house while she talked nonsense in Mexican.

Probably cursing the housewife and her ridicules orders.

The woman had quit after only a week and three other housekeepers had followed in her footsteps. Only the gods knew how Sam's father could endure his wife for more than a few hours at a time.

"Whoa, you're loaded?" Valerie asked surprised and Sam gave Tucker

a nasty look.

"Yeah, I'm loaded – and shut up, Tuck. The last one stayed a month and you know it," Sam replied gloomy.

They all looked up when a little boy tried to get into the tube slide. Tucker recognized him as the same fat kid, that always felt the urge to slide the tube when they hid in it.

"I want to slide, move!" he commanded and Sam rolled her eyes.

"The tube slide is reserved for teens today. Get lost, kid."

The little boy scowled and ran up again, but not without a, "witch."

Sam was after him, faster than you could blink and Tucker followed her with his eyes, as she chased the screaming boy around the playground. He shook his head in sympathy, "that kid will never again feel safe on the monkey bars."

"Forget the monkey bars," Valerie whistled impressed, watching Sam tackle the kid into the sandbox, "his gonna check under his bed for goth girls, for the rest of his life."

"You're all so childish," Jazz complained and remind them of her digital presence, *"but I suppose we have more important things to think about than an innocent child's traumas. If Vlad's "office" wasn't meant as in his castle or the mayor's office, then what?"*

"Actually…I think I know," Tucker interrupted. He had pulled his laptop out of his backpack in need, now that Jazz reserved his PDA.

He turned to Danny, "do you remember the group we thought Vlad had invented in order to lure you and your mother to that nonexistent mother-son science symposium in Florida?"

Danny nodded a bit confused, "and? What does is have to do with Vlad's office?"

Tucker typed and turned the screen for them all to see, "well, turns out it's a real million-dollar company in Wisconsin. Vlad is the owner and president of it and everything."

“What!” Danny grabbed the laptop and stared in confusion at the picture of the giant fifty storied office building, featuring the company name on the top in black letters. Vlad was captured with a bright white smirk in front of it and the list of the company’s achievements and subsidiaries stood listed under.

Sam snatched it out of his hands, as she had returned from her fight for female justice and dominance of the playground, “Vlad may be crazy as a fox in moonlight, but would he really be insane enough to bring a prisoner to his office?”

Tucker shrugged, “maybe he got it mixed up with ‘bring a kid to office day’?”

“So…we’re going to Wisconsin?” Valerie asked and looked at them all in turns.

They all shared a look and Jazz sighed tired with a frown, *“I pack my bags.”*

-

Danny scouted the fresh night air and waved his hand, “they’re gone!”

The specter-speeder lifted up from the top of Fenton-works and Sam let it hover, in order to allow Danny to phase back in.

The trip to Wisconsin had to be perfect, if they wanted to catch Vlad by surprise and the plan had been constructed in the janitor’s closet right after yesterdays’ lunch break.

In order to take the trip without Vlad finding out, they had to keep both Skulker and The Fright Knight busy for at least five hours and make them stay in Amity Park.

Sam, Tucker and Danny had acted as if they were going to stay at Sam’s place for a sleepover, in case Vlad’s spy-bugs were listening in and left Fenton-Works for the weekend. Dani and Danny had built up their strength and made two super solid duplicates each.

One of Danny’s duplicates would be dressed up as Tucker, while

Dani's would be playing Sam, to team up with a Dani and Danny duplicate and fool their hunter and knight into a chase around town.

While the two halfas had worked on their decoys and Sam had done the makeup, Tucker and Jazz had done their research and found the building plane for the DALV company building.

An article had revealed that the building had been renovated a year back and something could indicate that the buildings ground and basement facilities had been expanded. The company's ceo office was located on top, but the best guess for a secret infirmary or prison would be under the building.

Valerie had made her part of the work by helping Tucker hacking into Vlad's official working schedule, with her father's employee profile. Now that they knew Vlad's coming and goings at the office, they could get to the place before him and possible make an ambush, if they didn't find Arianna in time.

Danny placed himself between Valerie and Sam in the cockpit and gave thumbs up to Jazz, Tucker and Dani on the backseats.

"Skulker and Fright Knight is lured to the park, part 2 of the plan is ready to go."

"On it, little brother," Jazz insured and picked up the phone. She dialed their house number and gave the phone to Tucker, who pointed it to his PDA speaker.

"Hello, this is Fenton-works, Jack speaking and currently eating homemade fudge!" Jack said vociferously, clearly eating the infamous fudge and Tucker pressed the play button.

"I am a ghost, fear me," the calm female voice said monotonic and Tucker had to cover his mouth to avoid his laughter from being heard.

"What!?" Jack yelled and assumingly forgot all about his snack and cheery tone, *"come out of the phone, you ghost scum!"*

"I am a scary ghost – currently haunting the park. Fear me."

“Maddie! Get the gear and grab the RV! We’re going to the park!” Jack yelled from the other line and cut the connection. Tucker closed the PDA.

“That should keep the ghosts and ghost hunters busy for some time, if your decoys won’t be enough.“

They all watched as the Fenton couple sprinted out of the house and rushed to the RV, before disappearing down the street with screeching wheels and loud speaker, telling people to get out of the way.

Jazz locked her seatbelts, “looks like our alibis are working, let’s go.”

“Got it,” Sam called and set full speed towards Wisconsin. They were all pushed into their seats as the speed pressed them backwards and Danny – that had forgot all about that little detail from his own trip – was flung back and hit the end of the speeder, luckily landing on one of the beds in back.

He thanked his mother for installing the mattresses and waited for the speeders indoor atmosphere to regulate and make it possible for him to move freely again, without the press of speed.

“Nice equipment,” Valerie whistled and admired some of the weapons stored in the back, “makes me considering upgrading my own gear again – is that a bazooka?"

Valerie inspected the weapon storage like a kid in the candy shop and Danny snorted by the sight, “it’s actually pretty nice being around her as Phantom, without fearing to be blasted every second.”

“I know,” Sam sighed a little irritated, “but I would have preferred if you could have kept this just between us, Danny. Going around spilling your secret like that is gonna backfire at some point – and it’s not only your own secret anymore.”

She pointed over to Dani who was openly flirting with Valerie and clearly doing a lot better job than Danny had ever performed, “now it’s Dani and Arianna’s secret to. You think Arianna’s gonna thank you for telling her secret identity to Valerie?”

Danny knew he was taking huge risks, but couldn't be bothered. Telling his secret to Valerie had felt like heaven.

"I'm sure she'll understand when Valerie helps us storm the place and get her out. The only thing that matters now, is that we get her out of Vlad's claws. Who knows what he had done to her after four months?"

Sam didn't have an answer to that and kept to her navigating, while Danny watched over Tucker's shoulder to see their position on the digital map.

Wisconsin had always been a lot of fields, cows and fruitloop in Danny's world, but Milwaukee was anything but farmers soil. The large city lighted up in the night like any other modern city and flashed with different colors of light in the nightlife.

The downtown area that held the DALV company, showed several tall office buildings and park area's where a lake reflected the clear night sky like a mirror. The big ominous letters on the buildings top shone like polished onyx and was far the tallest building between its peers.

Sam turned off the speeders headlights, while the halfas kept it invisible and landed silently on the buildings top.

Tucker checked his PDA and nodded severely, "he left work two hours early – or at least one of his duplicates was scheduled to take a limo home."

"Good enough," Danny said and turned to his team, "ready?"

Sam clicked her specter-deflector on her battle suit clad hips and lifted her two ecto-guns. Tucker lifted the bazooka to his shoulder and clicked various gadgets on his own suit with thumps up.

Jazz pointed with her Fenton-peeler and the metal gun unfolded and clad her in metal armor with a snap. She nodded. Valerie jumped into the air and her hoverboard unfold under her feet along with her own red suit and helmet.

Dani transformed with a cunning grin and strapped a thermos to her back, along with the rest of the team.

Danny nodded by the sight of his team, pretty impressive, “looks like it – let’s go!”

Chapter 9

Notes for the Chapter:

Hey Phantom people
Hope you're ready for another chapter - enjoy

Vlad's office was a 60 square meters' room, clad in light warm tones and modern furniture.

It reminded Danny of those expensive and elegant boss offices you always saw in movies and the polished wood and glass shone bright with the futuristic art that was certainly placed after designer provision.

The panorama windows gave the wide desk a perfect view to the lake and lower parks outside, and cast long shadows' in the night. The office had to cost a fortune.

Danny pushed a vase to the ground without a second though, "my bad."

Dani snickered, but Jazz gestured to him to keep it down and cut it out.

The Phantom team underwent the office the same inspection they had forced upon Vlad's castle, mountain chalet and mayor office, and everyone started to check the walls for secret rooms and maybe traps.

Danny's eyes landed on the desk. The furniture was the only thing that held a more personal touch to it and Danny more anticipated than feared it, when he turned around the only picture frame on the disk and found a picture of a smiling dark-skinned woman.

Danny didn't recognize the picture, but it was clearly Arianna – just younger and clearly human. Danny guessed Vlad had acquired a picture of her from before she disappeared into the zone or something. Maybe it had even been taken by her family or old friends.

In a way she looked more like herself, here frozen in a frame, than she had ever done in her human glamor and Danny sought her sweet features for clues.

“The office’s clear, nothing here,” Tucker informed and Danny put the frame down.

“Then the basement it is.”

Sam and Tucker grabbed his hands, while Dani took Valerie and Jazz, and they two halfas started phasing down the building with their people in hand. The many offices and open lounges swept past them in seconds and Danny felt a light tickling in his stomach, like he was riding a rollercoaster.

A few late working employees wandered the offices along with the security guards, but other than that, the place seemed quite and dark.

Danny and Dani slowed down their descending, as the group reached the underground parking lots and Danny stopped when the last concrete ground rejected any further intangibility with a force field.

“Alright, that’s how far the ghost-vator goes – what now?” Valerie asked and Tucker searched the parking lots.

“Either he has a secret opening or he has some kind of device that allows him alone to phase through the shield,” Tucker suggested and Jazz made gesture for them to spread out.

“Let’s check for the opening first. Its Vlad we’re talking about, so look for anything else than a subtle entrance.”

None of them wasted any time and started exploring the cars, concrete and broad walls. Danny teamed up with Sam and phased hither and thither, while she investigated the cars for any hidden passengers or installations that could work as a door.

Jazz won the nonexistent treasure hunt prize, when she called them to her and they assembled by a single parking lot. The lot was empty, but clearly big enough for a limo. Jazz pointed to the reservation plate and Danny had to read it three times, before he got it and facepalmed.

'Reserved: Suim Salp.'

"Suim-salp – Plas-mius," Danny groaned, "he could have chosen any name, but it had to be his own, what a fruitloop."

But that was Vlad for you – that guy couldn't' go five minutes into a conversation without spilling his evil plans, so why entrust him to hide his evil lair?

"The radar says there a large room beneath us," Tucker informed with one of his various gadgets and pointed the scanner to the ground, "big enough for our girl, I'll say."

"This better be it," Danny whispered and stuck his hands into the ground. He fished around for a second or two and found the edge of the ghost shield, where the first steps to a staircase could be felt just under his fingertip.

Danny and Dani phased the others with them and Danny made a pained groan, as they were meet with the same type of hindrance, he and Dani had found in Vlad's castle. A fucking security door.

"This shit again? We don't have your eye or voice records, Vlad!"

"What? You thought this would be easy?" Sam asked sarcastic as she turned her flashlight on and Danny frowned.

"No, I just hoped I had been through enough. Tucker help me here."

"Tucker is ma' name and hacking is ma' game," the geek said assertively and connected his equipment to the doorpanel, "alright the first one is a password –"

"Arianna Masters," the Phantoms replied gloomy in unison and the others winced.

"Yikes."

"I would say it's more like an 'ew'," Dani corrected and stepped aside for Tucker.

The geek entered the password and was led forward to the eye and

voice scanner. The others watched with withheld breath, as he worked his magic and found a video on youtube.

It was from some kinda economy debate some talk-show host had made with Vlad a year ago, about his company expansions and Danny could already tell he was bored just by watching one minute in.

Tucker adjusted the quality and volume, before playing it to the little microphone on the door. He repeated the part where Vlad said his own name until it was accepted by the door and unlocked the next part.

Next, Tucker took a trip to google images and searched for 'Vlad Masters'. A couple of official pictures came up along with other paparazzi and press photos, but Tucker chose a large detailed photo, where Vlad were looking right into the camera with a winning smirk.

He zoomed into one of the midnight blue eyes, until he had reached an iris diameter of 75 pixels and printed the small part of the picture out on a small printer in his backpack.

"This baby can make the resolution of 1200 dpi – perfect for cheating an iris scanner. God thing I always carry all my stuff with me, or we'd be screwed."

"That's really going to work?" Valerie asked dubious. Tucker took the finish print and placed it in front of the scanner, "like piece of cake, my warrior princess. Good thing Vlad have such bright eyes, or this would be difficult."

Tucker received a high-five from the others, when the scanner accepted the fake eye and opened up to the next security lair.

"Down!" Tucker yelled and everyone jumped flat to the floor as a ecto-gun fired in all directions in a crazy showdown of scanners and living target searcher. Danni turned the others intangible, while Danny flared his hands and leaped up to hammer his fists into the gun.

It took five heavy ecto-strikes and a great deal of ice, before the ecto-

gun stopped its killing spree and Danny was breathing heavy with bloody knuckles, dripping green ectoplasm on the ground.

“Whoa, Danny,” Sam began and reached for his bleeding hands, but he pulled his hands to him.

“No time for that, let’s just find Arianna and get out of here, before the security alarm warns Vlad!”

They form a quick battle formation and sneaked through the door with lifted weapons. The humans activated their night visions goggles, while the halfas used their natural ghost sight and walked into the deep velvet darkness.

They had all entered the second room, when they were meet with a single computer screens, showing various numbers, security camera observations and notes. Tucker took of his helmet and placed himself in front of the desk.

“Someone cover my back.”

Valerie and Dani placed themselves by his side and Danny led the rest further into the basement. Long hoses with green fluids and machines connections filled the corridor and they opened the doors one by one.

The first was a bathroom, big and modern enough to be a part of a penthouse apartment and the bedroom on the other side of the corridor was held in the same luxury and style.

Vlad were clearly living down here, but the bed was made and the sink was dry, so apparently not in this exacts moment.

The next room was more of the expected and they entered slowly. Danny had been into Vlad’s secret laboratory back at his castle once and concluded that this place was a smaller copy of it.

Complete with the purple-pinkish color design and counters filled with vials and flasks. Danny walked around the control panels that were arranged in a segmented circle and found a single pentagonal shaped ghost portal on his left, making lazy swirls in its toxic green sphere.

“We better close this,” Danny warned and walked to the portals panel, “just in case Vlad chose to enter through here.”

Danny shirked as a black leather clad hand grabbed him by the neck and forced him around.

“Or maybe he’ll just use the door, Daniel.”

Sam fired her guns with a battle roar and Jazz joined her. Vlad threw Danny into one of the counters and put up a shield to protect himself, before duplicating into three. The duplicates grinned with sharp fangs and fired at the two girls, who took cover behind machines and counters.

“Very impressive getting behind my security system, children,” Vlad drawled and dodged the ecto-strike Danny had meant for his head, “but I’m afraid uninvited guests will have to leave through my portal.”

“Fruitloops first!” Danny yelled and fired a ecto-blast into one of Vlad’s duplicates, making it dissolve into red smoke and its energy return to the real halfa.

Vlad smirked and backhanded him with a single hit that sent Danny into the ground. The teen phased in panic, as Plasmius stomped the spot he had landed and Danny jumped him as he came back though the wall.

Sam and Jazz destroyed the rest of the duplicates and lighted up as the rest of the team stormed the door to the lab.

“Take that, you creep!” Valerie sneered and hit Vlad in the stomach with a blast. Danny got back on his feet and turned to the wall Vlad had made a crack in. The man laughed and rose to the air.

“Well, well, well, I see the little gang has expanded,” he said amused and counted on his hand, “a former bounty hunter and a daughter of mine, both huge failures and silly little girls coming to get me. How *quaint.*”

Dani gritted her teeth, “we’re not your anything and the only thing you get, is what’s coming for you, you monster!”

“Where’s Arianna?” Danny growled and felt his eyes flare along with his fists.

Vlad put his hands up in a mocking manner, “oh, I never get tired of that temper of yours, my boy. But don’t you worry your young silly head. Our little hybrid is exactly where she needs to be.”

He grinned devilishly, “with *me*.”

“Over my dead body!” Danny roared and shot at him. Vlad laughed and turned into five duplicates that spread out and fired at the group. Sam slammed her goggles down and fired her laser at the nearest target.

“Danny, go! We'll keep them stalled!”

“I’m not leaving you guys!” Danny yelled and were sent flying by one of Vlad’s ecto-blasts.

“Get Arianna! That’s the most important!” Jazz said and stepped in front of him with a wide shield, “don’t let him get to her first!”

Danny gasped as one of the duplicate – and possible Vlad – phased trough the lab’s wall and out of sight. Danny rose to the air and gave the chaotic scene one last glance, before turning intangible and followed Vlad out to the corridor.

The older halfa was nowhere to be seen and Danny floated the last stretch before he reached the last door at the end. The door was slightly ajar and a soft green light shone through the crack. Danny pushed it open slowly and floated into an office.

The style and furnishing were a lot more personal than the CEO office on top of the building and instead of a disk and laptop, three huge screens stood paced around a chair, where an abandoned knitting set and cup of tea had been spilled on the coffee table.

Danny suspected Vlad had been holding up here when they had entered the place. A table on the other side of the office held a chessboard and Danny lifted an eyebrow. He knew nothing of chess, but weren’t the black king supposed to have a black queen?

The black king stood side by side with the white queen, both facing a lone white runner surrounded by black pieces. A few white pawns behind flanked the white runner and seemed ready to move along with it.

Danny shook his head and left it behind him. He turned his focus to the screens and tried getting some sense out of the countdown that they were showing.

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Danny's concentration turned down the drain, when he felt another ghost signature and blue mist left his lips. It was a strong signature, but didn't belong to Vlad Plasmius. Danny landed softly on the carpet and slowly tuned to a door on his left.

The green light from before where evident under it and the signature got stronger as he walked to it.

"Arianna?"

There was no answer and Danny phased through the door. A more clinical lab and possible infirmary appeared on the other side, with the long hoses from the corridor hanging from the ceiling crisscrossing and tangled.

All containing the same eerie green liquid. The place was warm and softly lighted with a green hue in the dark. When Danny moved behind a counter with samples and medical supply he found the source and widened his toxic green eyes.

A huge glass tank stood clamped on a platform of machinery and glowed with the large amount of ectoplasmic fluid that filled it to the brim. A serene figure floated quietly upright inside it, connected to an oxygen mask and a couple of IVs hooked into her arm.

"Arianna!" Danny flew to the tank and almost crashed into the glass surface, "wake up!"

The calm expression of Nightshade's face remained and Danny felt a

shiver roll down his back, as he understood she was unconscious and as good as comatose in there.

“Don’t worry I’ll get you out.”

He turned his hand intangible and reached to the glass, when a fist hit his face and made him fall to the ground. Vlad placed himself in front of the tank with clear intention of defending it and Danny jumped to his feet with a scowl, “you gonna pay for this, Plasmius!”

Vlad threw a shield over the tank, as Danny sent his ice disks at him and the man meet Danny in the middle of the infirmary with a punch. Danny ignored the pain in his chest and kicked Vlad into the counter under them.

Danny made hast to the tank, but felt Vlad’s hand grab his ankle and was tugged down the ground, where glass cracked under his back and the smashed liquors had made the floor slippery.

That gave Danny and idea and he turned the floor to ice, “let’s see how you like being caged, fruitloop!”

Vlad scowled as his boots got stuck in the ice and returned the favor, by sending electricity through the water in it. Danny cried out in pain and found Vlad’s wide palm lock itself over his mouth.

Danny blinked hazed, but Vlad weren’t focusing on him, but the tank with a panicked face. Danny took advantage of his enemy’s distraction and pressed a ecto-blast to his chest.

Vlad groaned as he was thrown down the floor and Danny formed several ice spikes, before sending them after him with telekinesis.

“Look at me when I beat you up, Vlad!”

Vlad gasped as the spikes nailed him to the floor and Danny’s eyes widened when green ectoplasm colored the red tunic. The duplicate’s body dissolved and Danny’s relief was disturbed as he felt hot air against his ear.

“I am, my boy.”

The blast pressed into his back beat all the air out of Danny's lounges and Vlad grabbed him from the floor and slammed him down on the overturned counter. Danny turned around with a kick and was meet with Plasmius' hands around his throat, "nnnnrghh!"

The hand tightened and made the teens eyes go black for a second. The fear of dying hit Danny like a hammer and he grabbed Vlad's hands with desperation. Normally he knew deep down that he would wake up again.

Beaten up and with a sore throat in his room or the ally that they had fought in, but alive nonetheless. But that was before.

Danny still didn't know if Vlad would had killed him to get Arianna back at their last meeting, but the gun against his temple had been something Danny would never had predicted Vlad to use against him.

This time Vlad would have Arianna where he wanted and Danny were in his way. He remembered her softly but fearful words that night she almost died.

"Danny, will he shoot you?"

Vlad's hands loosed up just the slightest bit and Danny inhaled for all that he was worth and opened his mouth. Vlad's red eyes widened as he realized Danny's intensions and the ghostly wail was violently caught in the teen's throat, as the older halfa shocked him with his ghost stinger.

The suppressed sonic scream made Danny all lightheaded and he almost didn't get Vlad's panicked ramble.

"Are you out of your mind, Daniel!? You could have killed her or worse – tuned her into a vegetable!"

"W-wha…?"

Plasmius slowly let go of him and showed with serious gesture, that Danny should remain calm, "look at her. What do you see?"

Danny didn't trust him one second, but turned his head slowly nonetheless, "I see Arianna floating in some green goo inside a tank,

like some preserved experiment in formaldehyde, your sick fuck – what do you think I see!? What the hell have you done to her, you freak!?"

"Keep it down," Vlad shushed and made sign for Danny to follow him to the tank, "I would highly recommend you to challenge that observation, Daniel. What I have done to her? I have saved her life, boy. Done the impossible. I have saved her from self-destruction and healed her decaying body and heart. Without me she would be dead by now."

He pointed to her as she transformed in her sleep and returned to human again, "look at her and tell me I was wrong for bringing her here."

Danny glanced to the woman. The human Arianna floated slowly up and down in the green liquor, full bodied and clearly healthy. The resemblance to the picture upstairs was almost creepy.

She and her ghost glamor could be twins, but there was a subtle difference between them. This Arianna just seemed more…real. Her third eye showed up on her forehead, blinked sleepily before disappearing again and the lose dark hair waved silently along with her white underwear.

The green glow made her seem like a huge doll, but it was her for sure. She was alive and well.

"What do you mean, 'turning her into a vegetable? What's wrong with her?"

Vlad had placed himself beside Danny with his hands folded on his back and glanced up to the unconscious woman with an unreadable expression.

"Her state of healing is still critical and her heart haven't fallen in synch with her core yet. Besides that, she's still weak and the shock from being violent waken, would be the same reaction we as humans undergoes when we are born. It will be bright, cold, and painful. Unlike a newborn, she's not mentally or physical prepared for it. The shock would possible turn her body into a catatonic paralyzed mess,

or give her a severe heart attack. You chose, my boy."

Danny turned to give the man some sarcastic remark, but stopped.

Vlad's red eyes were focusing at the cylinder with the look of a lost man. Danny didn't know what to think of the way Vlad seemed to almost vanish into his own thoughts, focusing on the unconscious woman.

Had Danny ever seen a picture of himself, he would have known that he too would make such an expression, whenever Sam smiled with a sweet blush, or when the clear night sky lay open before him with all its constellations and stars.

Danny looked from her to Vlad, "…you're lying."

"Oh, you want to test that, Daniel? Go ahead, be my guest," he retorted coldly and stepped aside to allow Danny access to the control panel.

Danny gave him a scowl and moved to the buttons and levers. One of them said, 'reopen' and Danny reached. But then stopped. Thought about the possibilities and consequences. He felt sweat roll down his temple and could fell Vlad's eyes drill into his back.

Danny had waited for this for three months and it seemed ridicules to stop now, that he finally had found her and Vlad had giving him a free-card to her release. He glanced to the tank. She looked fine behind the glass, like some big veiltail goldfish, or some pickle in a jar.

Nothing indicated that awaking her should have any consequences what so ever.

But then again…did he really dare to take the chance?

Vlad were still watching him and Danny's hand began to shake a little. If he took the risk and end up killing her…he knew absolutely nothing about this medical stuff and if he just jumped to stupid conclusions that he couldn't do over…

Danny's inner mind send him back in time and showed him the

melting clone of himself. How Clone-Danny had reached for Vlad in fear and desperation, just to dissolve into nothing and turn to goo.

It had happened so fast that Danny haven't had the time to think and he had never again allowed himself dwell on the whole situation. What had happened in the underground lab under the mountain chalet, still seemed like a nightmare to this date.

Distant and nauseatingly – and completely out of Danny's hands.

But her life was in his now.

The door exploded as the others stormed it and Valerie put Vlad on her crosshairs, "now we have you, you – !"

Danny tackled her and pressed his palms to her mouth, "shhhh! You gonna wake her."

Sam opened her mouth to ask him what the hell was going one, when she caught sight of the tank and gaped, "is that...?"

"Arianna Vøvler in her human form, yes," Vlad replied informative and walked to them.

The others took a step back and lifted their weapons. Jazz pointed with her charging Fenton Peeler, "get her out of there, now!"

"I'm afraid that's not safe nor possible, my dear," Vlad replied and made a gesture to Danny, "as I so kindly explained to your brother, our little hybrid here, is still too unstable to be moved and let out of the concentrated ectoplasm I have especially design to heal her human and ghost half."

He chuckled with grave amusement and shook his head, "removing her from this medical facility, wouldn't only be reckless, but dangerous. She needs more time before I can remove her from her comatose state."

Sam, Tucker and Jazz shared a look and Tucker tuned to Danny who had released Valerie and helped back on her feet, "dude, is that true?"

Danny felt his mouth dry out and saw Vlad giving him an unreadable glance out of the corner of his eye. Danny licked his lips and nodded quietly, “she’s not ready.”

“Then when will she be?” Dani asked with a frown and Vlad transformed back to his human form.

“Well, I believe I have a deadline for that – follow me please.”

Danny turned back to human as well and shrugged when Dani gave him a frown.

She sighed, “I thought we’re had agreed to kick his ass, guys,” and transformed to match the other halfas. Valerie kept her gun raised along with Jazz and Sam took Danny’s side along with Tucker, as they followed Vlad back to the office.

She pushed him closer with a whisper, “Danny, what’s the plan?”

“I don’t know,” he retorted, felt cornered and confused. None of them had taken Arianna’s condition in on the equation. Would she really have died if Vlad haven’t stepped in?

The three screens came into view and Vlad made his access and showed of the countdown Danny had noticed before he entered.

“I made this based on her own healing abilities and the extra my medical equipment would add. She should be ready and safe to wake up when it hits zero.”

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“Three months!?” Tucker asked horrified, “you can’t be serious!”

“I can assure you that I’m more than serious,” Vlad retorted and leaned up against his chair with crossed arms, “and unless you young people have another functional and medical equipped lab, that you would risk moving her to – and no, the Fenton lab is absolutely out of question – then I suggest you let her remain in my custody and medical assistance.”

“Like hell we will,” Sam sneered and Vlad lifted an eyebrow.

“Talking for the whole team, are we?”

Sam lifted a finger at him, but seemed lost in words. She grabbed Danny’s shoulder instead, turned him around and waved the others into a close circle.

“We can’t let her stay with Vlad, his as good as a crazy scientist!” she whispered and locked arms with the others.

Tucker bit his lip, “but where would we place her? Where would we get the equipment and medical skills from?”

“There’s always my parents?” Danny suggested and Jazz gave him a worriedly look.

“That’s a little much for them to take in at once don’t you think? I’m sure they accept you, little brother, but what if they won’t help Nightshade?”

“We can’t give her over to ghost hunters,” Valerie hissed bewildered, “she’s a nice person – you can’t risk something like that!”

Dani had stared at them all in turns and bit her lip, “guys, I know this is gonna sound crazy, but…maybe we should let her stay.”

“Dani, no!” Danny squeaked, but his clone gave him an ashamed glance.

“Vlad is a fucked-up monster, I know – but I have seen him work and he has the skills for this kind of thing. He made me after all. I want this lady to go home with us, but maybe we should stop thinking about what we want and start thinking about what’s best for her.”

They all shared a miserable look and Danny sighed, “fine.”

Vlad hurried to return to his relaxed position, like they didn’t know he was listen in and checked his perfectly manicured nails, “come to an agreement?”

“We let Arianna stay here,” Danny said with a bad taste in his mouth

and Vlad smirked, “but we want a truce and some demands, Plasmius.”

“Using a cornered situation against your opponent, are we? Very good, Daniel,” Vlad chuckled, “then what do you propose to this truce?”

“We want you to remove Skulker and Fright Knight from Amity Park,” Danny said and pointed to Valerie and Dani, “and you let them alone from now one.”

“Alright,” Vlad said with a smirk, “since we have a truce I won’t need them roaming Amity any longer and I let your little team be. Anything else?”

“Yeah, you won’t try to move or hurt Arianna. We’ll be back to get her when it’s time to wake her up.”

Vlad gave him a sinister smile, “oh, don’t you worry, child. She will stay right here till she’s healed, but I can’t guarantee that you get her back that quickly. She is still my patient, my boy.”

“We’ll see – anyway here’s your servants, *Vladimir*,” Danny said with a smirk and threw a thermos to him while the others snickered.

Vlad caught the thermos in midair and lifted a surprised eyebrow, before he chuckled amused, “holding servants as prisoners and making research on your enemy, didn’t you? And you keep insisting on us being different.”

He smirked and placed the thermos on one of the still standing counters, “well then, if we are to be formal, I guess it’s only fair that I led you out the front door in a properly manner, hmm?”

Six duplicates appeared out of nowhere and took place behind each of them. Valerie made a yelp, as they grabbed them and teleported to the top of the building, “what the!? Urrrgggh…”

“Don’t worry, Miss Grey, the dizziness will disappear in just a minute or two, “Vlad informed as the green faced huntress ran to the speeder to find a toilet with a hand covering her mouth.

He turned to the rest of them and the duplicates dissolved into nothing, “with all the formality out of the way, I believe this is where we part. Until next time, –” he tuned to Danny, “Daniel.”

Danny made a tired sigh with a frown.

“Jasmine.”

Jazz made a sour pout.

“Danielle.”

Dani rolled her eyes, “shithead.”

“Samantha.”

Tucker and Danny grabbed her by reflex and held her back. They had a truce after all.

“What did you just call me, you old fuck –”

“And…” Vlad suddenly stopped with a perplex face, “and…”

All eyes turned to Tucker, who stared back at Vlad with confusion and maybe even expectation.

“And…” Vlad continued like a broken record, all cooked up in his search for what the name *‘Tucker’* had been given its diminutive form from.

Vlad made a blank face, “and… *Tuckerce?”*

Danny snorted and collapses on the floor laughing, while the others couldn’t or tried hard to control theirs. Tucker just stood there, baffled, “Tuckerce?”

Vlad hid his embarrassment by pushed them all the last stretch to their speeder and made sure they all got of his building, “and now leave!”

Chapter 10

Notes for the Chapter:

> This is going to be fast, cause I'm out of the door in two minutes
> hope you like it - leave a comment if you fell like it
> BYE!!!!

Vlad watched as the Fenton Specter-speeder left his company building and teleported back into his lab as soon the speeder where out of sight.

He reminded himself to make a better security system – maybe a thumb-scanner or requirement of an ectoplasm sample? – and entered his little bunker with course for the office.

The soft green glow in the darkness welcomed him with its familiarity and first when he had closed the door behind his back and stood pressed against it, would he let go and laughed till he ran out of air.

“Heart attack and countdown…Vlad, where do you get it from?” he chuckled and placed a hand on his head.

It had been close, maybe even too close, but once again it had all played out to his advantage and not only that – he had three whole months to use as he wished without Daniel interfering!

He stopped the countdown on the screens and felt the laughter return. He had been sitting in front of a recorded Packer game, when his security system had warned him about intruders.

They had passed his password, iris, and voice scanner without problems, but failed the signature test and activated the guns. He should have known a heat and cold seeking ecto-gun wouldn’t have been enough, but the thought that Danny would find him was little in itself.

Hmm, maybe he had underestimated the boy, but he'd had help of course. Nonetheless, the knowledge of Daniel's iron will and impressive durability filled Vlad with a fatherly pride and he forgave the boy.

When the truth was to be told, this had been a triumph for the older half-ghost and he patted himself on the back for being so cunning.

As soon as the intruders had walked through his door, Vlad had duplicated and run for the lab, while his duplicates had played the welcoming committee and lured the teens into a fight.

Vlad had been giving short time to come up with a plan that could ensure his claim to Arianna and out of nowhere the memory of an old black and white movie, that had run on a low budget and made a mess of hysterical scientific facts, had given him a wild idea.

He had made a fast countdown and decided for three months, not a second too short, when the boy entered. Vlad had suppressed his core and followed the boy into the infirmary, where he had let him get a good look at the other hybrid and then made his entre with a duplicate.

"Catatonic paralysis," he muttered amused, still not believing that he had come up with that on a whim and ran a hand through his neat ponytail, "I'm killing myself."

He turned to the door and felt a little smile unfold on his face. His patient was still floating safe and serene in her sleep and he laid a hand on the glass, "three months should be more than enough for us to get to know each other, hmm?"

He pressed the necessary buttons and turned the lever on the control panel, "I were actually going to give you just a day or two more, but I suppose the time now is as good as any, dear."

He stepped back and watched as the tank was tipped slowly and laid back horizontal. The machines worked slowly and quietly, as the next process was initiated and the concentrated ectoplasm was led out of the tank with a soft slurping sound.

Her features became more clear, as she was unfolded centimeter by centimeter. Her hair and skin was still glistening with green after the last fluid was led out of the tank and four shower heads rinsed her softly with tempered distilled water.

Without the glowing ectoplasm to illuminate the place, the infirmary was laid in darkness and Vlad stepped up to the tank as it dried her gently and the glass opened with a low hiss.

Vlad lifted the body with great care and laid her on a gurney he had placed for the purpose behind the tank. He made a duplicate and they worked together to get the oxygen and IV of her and place her safely on the gurney.

The hospital underwear was removed with a scissor and Vlad tugged her with a clean white blanked, before getting his duplicate to bring him a box from one of the counters in the back.

He sighed in relief when he saw his invention was in one piece and haven't been smashed in the fight, and made ready for the surgical intervention.

"This won't hurt much," he promised and rolled her gently onto her stomach. He pushed her long brown hair out of the way and made a small cut in the back of her neck.

He had to keep the wound open with his fingers to prevent it from fast-healing and placed the little chip on her exposed spine, before letting the skin creep back over it and hide it without as much as a scar.

The duplicate gave him a tissue and Vlad removed the little blood that had been spilled and transformed into Plasmius.

"Maddie, time to go, girl."

His cat and beloved companion made her appearance in the doorway and rubbed up against his leg with a purr. She had kept him and his patient company and he was thankful that she had been smart enough to hide under the attack and kept out of sight.

Heaven forbid that anyone hurt one of his girls.

His duplicate retuned with his belongings and the thermos, before lifting Maddie, while another one stayed behind to clean up the place and remove any evidence that it had ever existed at all.

They all shared a smirk of success and Vlad held his trophy close to him, as he teleported them back to his castle.

-

The castle was held in darkness, due to the fact that no servants had been here for three days and the duplicate opened the lid to the thermos.

Daisy, Temple and his Vultures fell out of the soup container and landed in a heap. They groaned and stood from the floor with pained protest and cracking backs.

“Ay, oi tart we never gettin' oyt of dat tight space,” the maid groaned and then forgot all about her sore back and stood straight by the sight of the Lord of the house, “Mr. Masters, sir!”

The chef cracked his neck loudly and stood tall and silent, while the vultures whined in their misery, “we’ve too old for this, and we’ve missed the *The Duchess Approves!*”

“Prepare a simple meal and take the rest of the night free,” Vlad ordered and started walking to the wide staircase with the still unconscious woman in his arms, “Daisy bring me a blood bag and a bowl of water with a clean cloth for the lady.”

Daisy made salute and ran for the kitchen while Temple followed her in his own heavy pace. Vlad walked the last stretch and phased through the door to a wide luxurious bedroom where a soft bed awaited his patient.

He tugged her in and made sure the light was of, before he lifted the drapes of the moonlight lit window in order to let the natural sunlight in when the morning arrived.

He hadn’t lied when he’d told Daniel, that an abrupt awakening from a coma could be uncomfortably – but resulting in a heart attack was highly unlikely.

The natural change in light would adjust to her gently, but effective from the dark state she had slept in and prevent her from waking violently.

He had found the prepared IV and stand in a corner of the room, when his maid phased into the room with a smile, “as ordered, sir.”

“Thank you, Daisy.”

The little ghost watched in silence as he hooked two needles with blood and nutritional formulae into Arianna’s arm, before taking her temperature and pulse, “stable,” he muttered to himself and took the wet cloth Daisy had wrung in the ice-water.

“Miss. Vølver is going to live with us from now on, Daisy. Be a dear and aske Temple to read up one Danish dishes.”

“Danish, sir?”

“Yes, and tell Vic, Jerome and Sullivan to return from their vacations as well. We have a guest who needs to wake up to a functional castle after all.”

Daisy bowed with a smile and phased out. Vlad lifted the cloth from the woman’s forehead and soothed her cheek tenderly. She breath calmly and for a second he was certain she had leaned into his warm hand.

A shadow moved by the open balcony and disappeared.

-

Arianna leaned into the back of the seats that filled the auditorium with hundreds of students and tried following the professor red line in the blackboards notes.

Someone should tell the lady that a good lecture was a mix of overhead notes and freely speaking – not halfhearted mumbling while you rummaging through your papers. The halfa lost the last of interest when the whole building tipped a nudge.

“Arianna!” *Danny yelled into her ear and she pushed him of her with a*

grimace.

“Danny, please, I’m not deaf, what is it?”

*The ghost boy waved his hands in front of her face, **“wake up!”***

“Okay, okay, I’m up,” she replied tiredly and stood out of bed, “hey, I feel like pancakes, what about you?”

*Danny grinned and took her hand, **“don’t worry I’ll get you out,”** he said and phased them both through the floor.*

Two shadows danced before her vision and she grabbed the popcorn on her lap, as she found herself seated in a soft cinema seat. She didn’t know the movie or plot, but she guessed that it could be shadow puppetry or something,

Danny, Sam and Tucker laughed at the movie in the seats next to her and she smiled at Danny. He lifted a hand close to her face and for a second she was certain that he would press it to her cheek or something, but then he withdrawal with a snap.

She blinked in confusion as a pair of cinema guests moved down the stairs next to them and stumbled, making a huge ruckus as they dropped their tray with stacked glassware on the floor. Arianna snorted and took a popcorn, “looks like they be out of order now, or what do you say?”

*Sam and Tucker snickered and Danny clenched his fist and slammed it down on the seat, **“you gonna pay for this, Plasmius!”***

“Well he is a millionaire so I guess that’s fair,” she shrugged and offered Sam some popcorn, “this movie isn’t really my cup of tea, any of you want to see a horror or slash movie?”

*The screen turned to one of her favorites and Danny was now part of the movie. The halfa ran up to what turned out to be Mr. Masters and slammed a cereal-box into a trashcan, **“let’s see how you like being caged, fruitloop!”***

*Masters, who apparently were played the leading role, frowned and pointed to the trashcan where food had been knocked out, **“are you out of your mind, Daniel!? You could have killed her or worse – tuned***

her into a vegetable!"

Arianna suddenly found that she was alone in the cinema and applaud at the sight of the two halfas one the screen.

The scene changed and they were now standing bent over a patient in something that looked like a medical drama sitcom and Danny waved panicky with his oven mitts, ***"what the hell have you done to her, you freak!?"***

The covered patient rose to sitting position and growled, clearly transformed into a zombie. Mr. Masters pressed the patient down forcefully, ***"keep it down."***

"Wuhu! Use the bone-saw!" she cheered. None of the halfas seemed to take her advice and began to move deeper into the screen and away from the camera. Mumbling to each other and making it impossible to understand a thing.

She soon lost interest in the movie and rose to leave the cinema. Back at the screen the tow began to speak louder in medical language and she made a greater effort to leave the building as she wasn't very fond of doctor terms and medical talk – made her rather skittish, actually.

A cold in her early years as a child, had left her with a phobia of hospitals and doctors, and unless they decided to do something to that zombie, she wasn't going to stay.

She sighed in content as she wandered out to the warm ocean and felt how the water hugged her firmly like jello. Danny and his friends were all fooling around in the thick water around her and she saw her Jazz and little brother fishing in a boat further out.

She waved and they waved back right before a waved made the boat tip over. They returned to the surface with goofy grins and healthy laughter. She giggled at their antics and swam up to the little island where Mr. Masters were sitting on a folding chair.

They had talked a lot these days and his smile were just as velvet as his voice, ***"three months should be more than enough for us to get to know each other, hmm?"***

“You make it sound like we’re strangers,” she replied confused and rested her head on the soft sand.

The warm and solid consistency of the jello sea, soon started to dissolve and she watched as the sea level fell and left her on empty land. Skies gathered over her and she lifted her face in wonder.

Drops of tropic rain poured on her face, bare shoulders and hands to wash of the sweet-smelling seawater. She lost herself in the feeling of rain, as it reminded her of her homeland and she opened her eyes again to watch the clouds spread and a hot wind dried her skin in the sun.

A feeling of dread suddenly filled her as the air got pregnant with light and painfully scratching sounds. A black cube rose in the distance and she was chilled to the bone.

The Cube.

“I can’t go back there,” she whispered and started to walk away from it, but no matter where she turned, the inky black building would follow and stay as a sign of evil in her vision. The world turned icy cold and she hugged herself as the temperature dropped further.

The cold was unbearable and she looked up as a man placed his jacket on her shoulders and smiled assuring to her, ***“this won’t hurt much.”***

“But it will,” she persisted hopelessly and hugged the jacket to her shaking body. Turned her head to the omniums cube, that shone dark as jet in the distance, “if I return to that place I will fall apart.”

All her fears, memories of shame, pain and hurt belonged to that place and she hid her face in his chest as he held her protectively.

She looked up and found that her father looked down on her with a tender smile under his red beard. She felt tears run down her cheeks, “I didn’t run away, I never wanted to leave you or Jonathan…please forgive me.”

The look in his eyes showed that he understood and she pressed herself into his red shirt. The red overtook her vision and the world turned into a swilling red mist that took her breath away.

-

Arianna's body left the first deeper layers of the medical unconsciousness and moved to the heavy state of sleep, that started to collaborated swiftly with her speed healing.

Her heart stared to beat more persistent and her mind slowly started to dig her back into consciousness, by fouling the muscles and poking her nerve system. Vlad noted this change, as he visited her next morning and laid a cold cloth on her head and checked her IV's.

He knew from his own experience, that she would wake more abruptly from the coma than most humans would, due to her fast reflexes and speed healing. Her awakening would be as after a normal light sleep and she would possible be fully conscious when that happened.

He didn't like to take the chance of leaving her to herself and risk her having a panic attack by waking up to unknown surroundings, so he made sure to be around the sleeping woman as much as possible.

Hoping to be there when she decided to return to the waking world.

He removed the cloth and leaned over her for a second to check the IVs.

-

Still unconscious, *Arianna wandered the empty land and felt the shadow of the Cube bury her in its darkness. She turned to it slowly, knew that she couldn't go one like this – but all in her told her to hide, to run or just fly far far away.*

"I can't go back there, I will never be able to leave again."

"We have to," Nightshade whispered merciless in her ear and pushed her forward, "only the weak stalls and only the weak dies. You're a dead soul. You're always be dead souls. You wake up, fight and go back to sleep. Repeat. You know who repeats and fight in here? The dead ones."

-

Vlad placed himself in the chair next to the bed and watched over his patient with thinning patience. She could wake any minute now.

-

“I’m a dead soul,” Arianna repeated with a sob and felt the heavy power from the place that was her inner demons wear her down.

Linda Runner had died by her hand, but the ghost woman’s signature reached her from the cube. Like a smell or memories from a distant time. Like rot. Like a slave cell.

“I’m not afraid of you…” Arianna whispered with clenched teeth.

‘Then prove it’, the cube seemed to whisper devilishly and Arianna let the jacket fall. She didn’t move an inch, but still her body seemed to move several kilometers in few seconds. The entrance to the ghost arena opened before her like a hungry mouth and she entered its darkness…

…Before the halfa “Nightshade” was created

there was a girl

and before the halfa…

there was a human.

The Scandinavian girl and exchange student moved one of the last boxes from the storage and took the Pepsi her professor handed her.

The Madison-Wisconsin university were the second stop on their paranormal study trip and the whole tour would last a half a year and a month if they sticked to the plan.

Arianna had been handpicked out of selected applications and could look forward to writing an interesting thesis at the end of her cand.mag, as she and her professor would get to work on their paper on American paranormal believes.

They had already visited Zaffis Museum of the Paranormal in Connecticut, at least a doesn’t famous paranormal hotspots and would continue to Amity Park, where a couple claimed (and

apparently where licensed as well), to be the world's leading ghost hunting experts.

"*Den må være I det andet depot, gider du kigge?" Miss Bronstein asked tiredly and pointed to the second storage down the hall.

Arianna followed her finger and nodded, seized her red bag and walked to the storage room with hopes of this being the last one.

The invention they were looking for would be a nice addiction to the paper and she didn't want the trip to the university to be a failure, but all that moving around with heavy and dusty boxes were getting tiring and warm in the thick summer heat.

She tried the light switch and found that the lightbulb was missing.

"**Lort."

She placed a chair to keep the door from closing and letting in some light, before she started rummage through the stacked boxes and musty teaching materials. She lifted her focus to the higher shelves and found that she could barely get her fingertips above the edge.

Unknown to her, just an inch out of grasp, the Ghost Portal experiment of the University of Wisconsin-Madison rested hidden in a dusty glass case, next to a card-box containing old protest signs from a nuclear bomb demonstration dating back to the 60'es.

Arianna was now standing on her toes and got her hand over the edge of the shelve. Groaned as she pushed the side of the dusty glass case and tried pushing it back, when she saw a glimpse of its content.

"***Endelig," she whispered satisfied and put in twice the effort to get the glass case closer to the edge.

The pushing resulted in one of the wooden signs from the neighbor card-box getting stuck around the glass case and when she tried pulling the box back to just place it on the floor, the glass case followed over the edge.

The exchange student made a high-pitched squeal as the heavy boxes came tumbling down and threw her hands up in reflex to protect her

face.

The wooden signs and card-box clattered to the ground and scratched her back and arms bloody, while the glass case landed heavy into her upstretched hands. Arianna groaned under the sudden heavy weight and balanced the glass case without much success on the rocking chair.

She was certain she would fall back over and land on the floor, when the chair rocked her back into the shelves and her upstretched arms slammed into them along with the glass case.

The case hit the shelves hard enough to make a crack in the glass case's surface and the machine old interior was shaken violently.

The old invention's fuses kick-started by the impact and produced blue sparkles as the dust burned up inside of it. Arianna's hazel eyes widened as the smalls portal suddenly lighted up above her and a green circle lighted her face and the dark storage up with its swilling green light.

The little ghost portal prototype had been abandoned back in 1987, when its creators Madeline Jones, Vladimir Masters and Jack Fenton had left college one way or another.

The university had the rights to all its founded projects and sold the invention to a paranormal study later in 1989, where the small portal was studied and placed in two or three studies, before it was given as a gift to a travelling museum of paranormal wonders.

The portal had been given a humble display case next to a camera that apparently could show people's soul with aura colors and a Victorian telephone, that claimed to be able to receive calls from the dead.

The curator of the exhibition had found the portal to dull in appearance and fixed it up by placing a green glass plate in its opening.

The little museums exhibition had made good money in the early 90's, where the interest for the paranormal and occult reached its

peak right before the 00's, but had later been forced to closed down due to unregistered possession of several art pieces.

The Portal had been confiscated when the museum couldn't show a proper paper registration and it were send back to the university, since the portal had been equipped with a label and address on the bottom.

Not knowing what to do with the outdated invention, the university had decided that the storage had been a temporary solution.

With the years, the display case had slowly been covered with dust and pushed further back, as the portal had been forgotten and lost on the top shelf in storage A-34.

Long forgotten by the university board and staff – but not by the university's digital list of student projects.

The last sticky remains of Jack Fenton's soft-drink burned up in the portals filter and the clean ecto-purifier drove the machinery to life. Creating an hypnotic green swilling light that both scared and mesmerized the woman balancing it above her head.

The decorative green glass plate in its opening reflected the portals power like a giant magnifying glass and the unfortunate student stared up into the green light with renewed horror, as the blast engulfed her without warning.

The display case exploded in her upstretched hands, sending glass and blood everywhere, as the light burned Arianna's face and hands. She screamed as her contact lenses melted on her eyeballs and made her blind for a second.

The ghost radiation fixed her blindness by speed healed her and produced a third eye. The brown hair turned a pinkish hue and paled her dark skin to a sickly white, all bloody scratches and glass splinters left the now halfdead body and healed the two last eyes.

Now black and without any rest of humanity. Without the glass surface, Arianna's hands lost the last grip of the situation and her scream drowned, as the portal swallowed her up like a magician's

hula-hoop ring and send her to the ghost zone head first.

The green sphere overwhelmed her as she fell down and into the green world. Unknown creatures and forms flew past her in an everlasting fall. Everything green, strange and dead. She lost conscious and surrendered to the ghost zone and the life she had known as a human.

Two rings formed around her midsection and turned her back human and a new voice took hold in her being. The witch-core whispered inti her soul with a voice that was her own, but wicked.

Hungry and demanding, calling for desires and raw emotions. Calling for what she had never dared to take as a human. What she had never dared to acknowledge.

Power, hatred, hunger **pain.**

-

Vlad checked her pulse and counted the seconds on his wristwatch. He found it to be normal and checked her temperature with a hand over her forehead.

It was a loos way to tell a patient's health of course, but she was out of any danger zone and he just liked to touch her. She seemed a little pale to him and he found one of the syringes with ecto-vitamins he had prepared yesterday.

He turned his back slightly to her to fill the syringe and didn't catch the sight of her eyelids stirring. Back on the bed, Arianna's eyes started to open and she turned her sleepy head to the sound of commotion beside her.

The female halfa squinted confused and her eyes snapped when she caught sight of the needle.

Vlad made a surprised gasp when a fist hit his stomach and she jumped out of the bed. Dragging the IV lines and racks with her and send it all crashing to the floor.

One of the blood bags broke, while the one containing ectoplams

snapped by the needle and turned her hand into a bloody mess. Arianna registered none of it and ran for the first source of escape her terrified and drugged brain could detect.

The open balcony.

Vlad knocked over his chair and fell with a yelp over one of the outstretched IV lines, before he got back up and phased through the bed to get to his patient, “Cheese logs!”

She had reached the balcony before he could stop her and she grabbed the banister in order to jump over and into the free air.

The invisible ghost shield stopped efficiently her endeavor and send her bouncing back to the unprepared Vlad Masters, who got his breath beaten out of him the second time.

Both of them landed hard on the floor and became a fight of tangled limbs. Arianna wasted no time as she got of him with an elbow in his chest and made the door her new avenue of escape.

Vlad decided he had had enough and grabbed her by the waist, forced her down on her knees and held her down with his weight. She cursed him in high-pitched Danish and that got him an idea.

“****Rolig nu, du er ikke I arenaen,” he said calmly and she stopped her fight instantly.

Turned her head slowly in confusion and blinked surprised. Hadn’t heard her own tongue in a decade and recognized the word even though the words had been spoken with a thick American accent.

She squinted with a frown, “…Mr. Masters?”

He loosened his grip. Knew that he had her now.

“Good morning, dear. Sleep well? That was quite the scare you gave me there,” he chuckled and she look around in confusion and narrowed her eyes to see.

Why was everything so damn blurry? She noticed her red hand and lifted it with confusion.

“Allow me,” he offered and she watched with wide eyes as he phased the needles out of her hand. He made gesture to aid it, but she pulled her hand back and forgot how to breath.

Stared at it in wonder.

Blood.

Not green ectoplasm or someone else’s blood.

Hers.

“That’s not possible…” she whispered awestricken.

Vlad started to speak again, but she was too far in her own head to detect a word of the longer speech. Something about how he had healed her human half and possible talk of concentrated ectoplasm.

The only thing that got through to her was the sound of her own breathing, the rush of blood in her ears and the smell of metal. The long-forgotten need to breath and taking in oxygen. Her warm human heart beating in her chest.

“– I took the liberty to open your bag and found some old contact lenses, but I can assure you that these are a lot more advanced and better in quality,” he continued and placed a pack of lenses in front of her.

She looked from his blurry face to the package and took it slowly. She felt him watching her as she placed the little optic lenses in her eyes and she lost her breath when the world came into crystal clear view.

Vlad outstretched a hand to her, but she had caught sight of a body size mirror and stood without help. The billionaire followed her amused and watched her as she approached the mirror almost timidly.

Arianna recognized the woman in the mirror as herself, just…more her. The wrong color pallet that had been part of her ghost glamour were now replaced with a reflection she had known from before she had lost half her life.

“I haven’t aged a day,” she whispered and felt her cheek in wonder.

Even her skin looked cleaner and better than ever and her hazel eyes seemed to be brighter than she remembered them.

“You got to tell me what products you have in those IV,” she said baffled and Vlad walked into the reflection with a wide smile.

“I’m sure that can be arrange, now tell me, how do you feel?”

“Amazing – I haven’t felt this good in years,” she grinned and suddenly remembered who she was talking to.

Memories suddenly returning like a crashing wave. Vlad seemed to read the change in her face and the smile got a bit more fanged, “excellent, my dear.”

Her reflection gave him a weak smile and sidled slowly away from him, “well, thank you for saving my life, orthodox as your method was…”

He followed her slowly with a knowing smile and took a step forward for every one she took backwards.

“I really appreciated it and…uhm...” she suddenly realized that she was wearing nothing but a white dress shirt way too big for her and shuddered.

She was naked under it.

Vlad moved and she jumped to the side, expected a transforming, but got nothing and fell to the floor. Vlad laughed by her antics and returned her terrified expression with a smirk.

“Why can’t I transform!?” she all but screamed and hurried to get back up and out of his reach.

“Noticed that, didn’t you? Don’t worry, sweetheart, you are still a perfectly functioning half-ghost, just under my house rules,” he teased and followed her as she tried getting the chair between them, “we couldn’t have you going hurting yourself, now could we? I have simply circuited your powers with a chip in your lovely little neck,

for as long as I want. For percussions sake, of course."

"No," she whispered in horror and Vlad grinned.

"Oh, yes. I have you know, that this will only be a temporary insurance from my side, since you're a guest in my house. This will be your room as well."

She looked around. It was nice and all, but she could recognize a prison when she saw one. It was defiantly better than a cold humid slave cell, but a prison nonetheless. Defeat and dead washed over her.

She was a slave again.

She was going back to the Cube.

Unless…she gave her new jailer a glance and swallowed.

The man was a halfa and hated by the Cube for going against them and their rules. Even though selling her back to the Soul Center's entertaining juggernauts surely would put him in a better light to them, she doubted that he would be stupid enough to try.

But then again…this man was unpredictable.

There was only one way to ensure he would think twice before handing her back to the Cube. She had to take a new master.

Vlad observed her as her pose suddenly became lax and she seemed to surrender.

She sighted as she walked out from behind the chair. Vlad was startled a bit, when she went to her knees before him and laid a hand upturned on her head, "I am your servant, I am your possession, I am your right…"

Vlad had never owned a human slave, but was more than familiar with the phenomenon and its customary, as he had roamed the Soul Center and seen the human slaves following their masters around.

The little half-ghost was swearing a new ownership to him, witch

where tradition when a former master died or the human slave were given as a present to a new master.

Seeing her on her knees and swearing herself to him was a tempting picture, but he had other plans for her in this moment.

She stopped her oath midsentence, as he lifted her too her feet and kissed her forehead, “the life as a slave is behind you, my dear. I get breakfast brought to your room and let you get dressed in private.”

Arianna stared at him in shock and awe. Not knowing what to do. Vlad just smirked and turned to the door. He was a foot away from the door when she snapped out of her troubled thoughts and ran to follow him.

“Wait!” she called hastily and made a pained sound as she hit the doors ghost shield head on. Vlad turned to her out on the hallway and she slammed her fist to the invisible force field.

“What kind of fucking ghost hunter crap is this!? I’m in my human form!” she scowled and slammed her hands against the shield again, looking for an opening.

Vlad frowned, “your mouth is far too sweet for such profane words. The shield is for your own good and works on both human and ghost. If I were you I wouldn’t waste my time trying to break through it – have a nice evening.”

“What have you done to Danny!” she yelled after him, but he didn’t reply. Arianna leaned into the shield, tried to calm down and put the pieces together.

And failed.

The entire situation didn’t made sense to her and she sank to the floor, “if he doesn’t want a slave, then why am I here?”

*** It must be in the other storage, can you go take a look?**

**** Shit**

***** Finally**

******calm down, you're not in the arena**

Chapter 11

Notes for the Chapter:

> Hey people
> I'm going home to see my family for easter tomorrow, so you're getting this chapter a day early
> hope you like it and leave a comment if you want

Dark relaxed on the beam up on the tower's ceiling and watched the scene unfold on the ground floor without much interest.

The Observants where accusing and threating again, making their claims about this and that. Clockwork listened to them and took their accusations and yelling with a calm, but annoyed demeanor.

Dark had seen enough of these performances to know that this was as good as commonplace for the master of time and part of the timekeeper’s daily routine.

The flaming ghost snorted. He hadn’t really paid attention to these silly eye-headed freaks, but now that he had to hide from them in time and again, he had been forced to learn a thing or two about their annoying existence.

He listened in hopes of something new, some juicy ghost zone gossip perhaps, but soon realized that he was wasting his time. It was always the same on their gooey minds.

The halfas.

Dark never had never been forced to listened to these idiots in his own alternative timeline. When clockwork had meddled, Dark had been too strong and to invested in his world domination to be bothered by all those opponents thrown at him from some far out future.

Dark had fought them all and won every time. Clockwork had never gone up against him in person, but Dark had learned about him

anyway and come to know him by heart (not that he had one).

However, the timekeeper had taken him by surprise, when he had meddled with Dark's own past and forced him to face his weaker and younger self.

Getting reminded of his past had almost kicked his feet from right under him and ruined the destruction of the last living human civilization on the planet.

Poor, poor Valerie had almost shot his past self in the believe that this Danny were Dark in his human glamor. Well, who could blame her?

He had used it several times during their fights and killed her entire rebel army, when he had tricked her the first time and infiltrated her base. She had been broken into tears, kneeling in her comrade's blood and defeat, watched him with eyes that still cared for the half-human he had ones been.

He had left her live for the sake of drama.

And drama there had been. The amusement of seeing her hesitate just that split second every time he turned to his glamor was priceless and even when she didn't he had still been able to watch as a little piece of her humanity died every time she had to face her past in him.

Dark guessed that the last feelings she had ever held for him had disappeared the day he had overshadowed her father and made him eat his own eye, before beaten him up with his own off torn arm.

It had been a nice trophy for as long as it had lasted and began to stink of decay. It had given him an excuse to come up with a lot of arm related puns when he had meet her in battle afterwards.

Hilarious.

He yawned with his cleaved tongue folded over his fangs, as the Observants got to the end of their ranting of complaints and left the tower. The timekeeper had switched to his child form and stared after them with clear loathing and a childish pout.

Dark couldn't keep himself from snickering by the sight, "never get tired of letting those fools step on you, do you?"

"An ego of solid steel came with the job qualifications," Clockwork drawled and tapped on the head of his staff. Making some of the screens flickering and change sights.

"Does it annoy you? Seeing them step on me like that?" he asked offhandedly with a smirk and Dark clenched his teeth in anger.

"Watching a weak ghost get his ass whooped day after day and just take it like a dog, is. You're pathetic you know that right?"

The now grownup timekeeper simply just smiled at him and it annoyed Dark to no end, "all that power and you use it for nothing else than to do their dirty orders and watching screens of the future with no intention of acting on any of it. Where's your self-respect?"

"Are you pep-taking me, Dan?"

Dark scoffed, "don't get your gears in a knot, I'm just stating the fact that you're a disappointment. And don't call me that."

Dark left his beam and moved to the ancient ghost, felt himself lose his temper. If all that power had been in his hands, the world and the ghost zone would be shaking with fear. He would be able to travel dimensions, destroy reality and even create cracks in time itself.

He would be unstoppable and only his own bloodthirst could set the limits. Clockwork, master of time, the timekeeper of the ghost zone and observer of worlds, *had* all this and what did he do?

Put himself on his back and welcomed lower ghosts to kick him.

It was sickening to watch and Dark had had enough of watching.

Dark hovered over the old ghost and his hands flared, "killing you would be merciful and what do you know… I'm in a *generous mood.*"

Clockwork hand shot for the head of the staff, but Dark were faster. The many hours of observing the other ghost had made him familiar with his moving patterns and reflexes when reacting to a threat.

Clockwork gasped as Dark cut him off from activating his staff with a heavy punch and the evil spirit started wrestle him for it.

Clockwork both knew and understood that the other was far stronger physically than him and advanced in a hand to hand match – a hand to hand combat would be certain death if he didn't end it now.

Dark growled and kicked the ghost in the stomach, but the other held on to the staff with a strong determination and headbutted him in return.

The evil phantom groaned as little constellations danced before his eyes and almost lost his grip on the staff, when the timekeeper tried twisting it out of his hands.

"*Not this time* " he growled and used his weight to send the other up to the stonewall and pressed the staff on his throat. Ghosts didn't need to breath and since Clockwork never had experienced human nature either, the pressure on his throat wasn't deadly, just plainly painful.

Clockwork made a croaking sound and Dark put more pressure on with a grunt, "you're pathetic! You're weak! You insist on watching over a world for the better good, but what good? It's just a shithole of dirty animals begging to be turned to ashes and guess what!? They will! You've just showed me that future! The human and ghost world will end as we know it – *And Still You Insist On Me Having A Future!"*

The time ghost's eyes almost popped by the last heavy pressure and long cracks ran up the wall behind him from the impact. Dark took it all in and tasted ectoplasm on his tongue. Having bitten himself at some point.

The both lost their balance, as the staff broke with a loud snap and the end with the head flipped into the shadows of the tower. Dark leaped for it, but the child ghost dragged him down by his cape and forced him to the ground.

Dark snarled as the cape were flipped over his face and clawed at the little nuisance, who shot for the lost staff and out of his reach.

Dark's blazing eyes flared and he raced the ghost with a ghostly tail and ecto-blasts.

"You caged me! Stole my victory!"

Clockwork dodge the blast and zigzagged behind his pillars and bells. Dark flew through them all, leaving destructing in his wake and smashed the bells to shredded metal.

"You destroyed my timeline!"

The timekeeper gasped as the ghost ray burned a hole in his purple cloak and crashed several gears and clocks. A few pillars and beams was all the held the tower together now and the building groaned dangerously.

"You stole my destiny!" Dark roared and felt his hair blazing, making several gears melt to nothing as he shot past them.

The now mature Master of Time reached the shadow his precious staff had fallen into and searched desperately.

He widened his solid red eyes as Dark Phantom extended his claws towards him and exposed his cleaved tongue and fangs, "AND STILL YOU DARE TO MAKE ME FEEL SORRY FOR YOU!"

The collision sent them both rolling across the stone floor and Dark made sure that the other took the fall by seizing his cloak. The evil phantom held the other down with his thighs and made a burning fist to break the clock that were the timekeepers core.

Clockworks eyes widened. Dark had tried killing him many times without success, but the evil ghost seemed to have finally realize the secret about the ghost zone's ancient beings.

Unlike spirits of the deceased human souls that spawned and come to inhabitant the zone, the ancients ghost like Clockwork had never experience death, life or pain.

His body was neither ectoplasm or an echo of that of a human existence with all its traumas and memory of final death.

His body was nothing more than an illusion. And astral images created by his core. And there lay the beauty and horror of it all.

The ancients may not have a body to kill…but if you destroyed the core…

"Time out!"

Clockwork's core ticked hastily and he felt the urge to use air like a human being and sigh in relief. The broken staff under him were the only source of power he had been permission after his enslavement and once again it had saved his life.

If he had missed it in the fall or failed to grab it in time, he would have ceased to exist. My, wasn't that a though?

Dark were still frozen above him, looking down on him with eyes that promised murder, hatred, bloodthirst… and sorrow. His red eyes moved an inch and the anger was clear.

Clockwork return those feelings with a tender hand on Dark's cheek and shameful eyes, "I know, Dan. Even you don't deserve that."

He pressed his lips to the other's frozen mouth and phased out of Dan's hold. The now old timekeeper walked back to the screens and found the other end of the broken staff. The two ends snapped together with his time powers and were as good as new in his wrinkled hands.

"Time in," he whispered and pushed the button on its head. Heard the other's flaring fist slammed down into the floor and possible making a crater.

Dark lifted his hand slowly from the ground and stayed on the floor for a second. His eyes were fuming, but he already knew that he had lost his only change of killing and the other. He would never get it back.

They both knew that.

A hand landed on his shoulder and Clockwork gave it a squeeze, "come, there is a future I want to show you."

Dark lifted his eyes from the ground and stared into the darkness of the tower, the feeling of the kiss still lingering on his lips, “what could you possible show me? I have already observed the destruction of this world. The only chance of destroying you. There’s nothing left to ruin or safe anymore, there is no future.”

“Well, certainly not with that attitude,” Clockwork smirked and floated to the screens in his child form.

Dark scuffed with a scowled and rose to his feet. The other had already turned his back to him and made a dark silhouette in the moving light of the screens. Dark moved to him slowly and the other turned his head.

“There is always a future – the time doesn’t stop for the sake of any world balance or keeper. The time is eternal and the future existing as an untouchable substance.”

He pointed to the screen in the middle, “I have taken your existence, I know. It’s time I make it up to you.”

Dark watched the screen and his frown lifted as his ruby red eyes widened in disbelief, “is that..?”

“Your future,” child Clockwork answered and moved to sit on his broad shoulder, “it may not be like the one you lost, but it has its moments. It’s yours if you want it.”

“And If I don’t?”

“Then there is always frontseats for the world's end to look forward to.”

-

Danny finally felt at peace.

The early spring and first day of March was filed with clear sun and the first fledgling signs of green leaves and flowers in bloom. Sam’s open black Cadillac sent fresh air through his dark hair and the sweet smell of promised summer vacation were everywhere.

Sam glanced to him with a smile, “someone is happy.”

“How can I not?” Danny grinned and turned the car mirror to find Tucker and Dani in the backseats, checking out the geeks PDA, “my life is finally going in the right direction. The ghosts have left the town, Dani is back, Valerie is on both my good side and we found Arianna.”

The whole angst and stressing search had come to an end and even if the thought of Vlad being part of the equation was a sour pill to swallow, it all seemed to lighted up in a positive way. He could relax now and sleep peacefully at night.

“Well, don’t get to comfy,” Sam warned with a smirk, “we have a test tomorrow.”

Danny leaned back on his arms, “I’m good.”

“There’s a rumor that the cafeteria menu will go back to vegetarian.”

“I’ll buy takeout.”

“It’s the flu-season.”

“Ghostly immune system.”

“We’ll get our letters of college acceptance today.”

Danny opened his eyes and sat up, “wait…already?”

Tucker leaned up to them with a grin, “yeah dude, we’re getting to know what college that accepted us. I can’t wait!”

Dani leaned back into her seat with a pout, “looks like your all gonna leave the town after the summer. Not fair, I was just getting use to this.”

“Yeah…” Danny mumbled and scratched his neck.

He had known that this day would come for years, but that didn’t change the feeling of it arriving to fast either. They would graduate in less than three months and go to their colleges spread across the

country.

Danny would either go to Wisconsin College or Florida, while Tucker had applied for California CalTech and Cornel in New York where his high skilled technical grades would secure him an acceptance.

Sam had applied for Washington EWU and thankfully; University of Wisconsin/Madison just like Danny.

If he were lucky he would get to go to college with at least one of his best friends and keep the contact intact.

Not that he wouldn't skype or visit his friends any time possible, but seeing your friends on a laptop screen and only get together a weekend every other week would be weird and who knew?

Maybe they would lose the contact over time. People often change over time and new environment and experiments – and not to mention new friends. Stuff like that could change even the strongest friendships and replace them with new and better maintained connections.

Danny felt dreadful and his insides coil up in phantom pain. Aha… pun…

He snapped out of his self-pity when Dani laughed at something Tucker had said and Sam rolled her eyes. Dani's humor was almost as bad as Danny's and even Tucker's worst joked could get her to giggle.

Danny watched her in the car mirror and saw himself put up a sad frown.

And what about Dani? He was to leave college just like the rest and with that leaving Amity Park. Maybe for good. Dani had no family or friends other than Valeri to turn to and even she would leave after summer. Where would Dani go then? Back to New York's dirty streets?

Danny shook his head and tried supplant the picture of his clone alone in a dark ally, lost and alone. He wouldn't allow it, but then what? Take her with him?

It was possible, he guessed. She could live with him, but what if he got a roommate?

How long could he go with overshadowing and persuade people to allow her to stay? Even if he succeeded, he would have to hide her, come up with lies and maybe even cage her in a little crowded college room, where she would possible die of boredom.

Knowing himself, she would probably do something stupid and maybe even get all caught up in herself like a lost child.

Maybe Jazz? Nah…same problems and no teen should be forced to listen to her know-it-all talk more than four hours a day. Sam and Tucker were the same case and leaving her in Amity were out of question.

His parents would hunt her and even if Danny walked the last line and told about her to his parents, he would have to turn himself in and tell them his secret.

Danny felt cold sweat appear on his back. No.

His inner fight went unnoticed by his friends and he was thankful for that. He needed a solution, but weren't sure where to find the answer to his prayers. He needed a trustful person to take care of Dani and help her fit into society if necessary.

Dani should have the chance of – at least something alike – a normal life and teenage existence. He could bring her to one of his ghost allies, but Dani should be with someone she knew and a human where to prefer…sorry Frostbite.

The tight circle of people Danny trusted and who knew about Dani's ghost half were small and first after he had skipped the idea of Vlad (he was her father in some way, weird as it was) that the perfect solution finally came to him.

Nightshade.

Arianna would be back in time for their graduation and completely healed to do as she pleased.

She would possible go home to find her family, but now that she wasn't dying or lived on days counted on a single hand, she would stay as a constant in Danny's life and could cross the continents with ease.

And who knew? Maybe Dani would get to like traveling Europe.

Of course, he would have to ask her to take care of his clone first and introduce them for each other, but since Dani were practical him – just younger and girlier – he was more than convinced that the older halfa would be thrilled to take her in and if he knew Dani right, she would stay with her and find the same trust and mentor in her as Danny had.

The other halfa could even help Dani to control her growing powers and assist her getting to Frostbite when her ice powers would appear and the time was right. Danny almost got jealous of the picture of those two together.

He smiled in content and found that they were almost at Fenton-Work. Sam parked and the two halfas jumped out – no chill for car doors when it's an open model.

"See you later," Sam promised and drove off with Tucker.

They waved and with a nod, Dani turned invisible and walked to the house. Danny only made it to the front, before his parents slammed the door open with big wide smiles and his father dragged him in.

Danny yelp and stared in surprise as they both placed a letter in his hand and cheered.

"Danny, it's your college letter, it came in while you were at school," his mother said cheery and his father almost jumped with excitement.

"This piece of paper is going to open the future for you, my boy. I can't believe my son is going to my old university and follow in his old man's footsteps. I'm so proud, if tears wasn't a sign of weakness, I would be crying with joy!" he sobbed and had to turn around, crying loudly.

Danny chuckled and turned the envelope. It was the seal of the

University of Wisconsin/Madison alright, with its golden shield and white 'W' on ruby red background. They haven't open it and suddenly Danny felt nervous.

What if he hadn't been accepted?

"Get yourself together, Fenton," he murmured and ripped the letter open. His parent and possible Dani (he could feel her reading over his shoulder) were silent while he read and Danny closed his eyes and sighed, "I'm going to Wisconsin University. I'm accepted."

Maddie threw her hands in the air, "YES!" and ran to the phone, "eat this, Alicia!"

Danny groaned in pain, as his father pulled him into a bone crushing bear hug and ignored his son's gasps for air, "this I one of the happiest days of my life! For a time, we were afraid you wouldn't make it with your irresponsible behavior, bad grades, late show up for curfew – not to mention bad grades."

"Your said 'bad grades' twice," Danny informed, but Jack Fenton couldn't be bothered today. Or anytime really.

"I'm so happy I could even shake hands with that ghost boy."

"Really?" Danny asked surprised. Hope slipping into his voice.

"Well, I would probably take his hand, as in chopping it of for further studies, but it's the thought that counts."

"Sure, dad," Danny said with a nervous grin and got rid of the gory picture by hugging his father back.

"Wait – if the letter arrived this morning, Tucker and Sam got to have theirs to," he realized and gave his father a last hug before running out the door, "love ya!"

"Love you to!" they both yelled and watched him run down the street, they both shared a grin, "now that we'll soon be having more empty rooms, it's time for planning that ghost observatory we have always wanted!"

-

Danny ran down the streets and Dani turned visible next to him as a flying ghost. Danny turned in a jump and made her company as they raced to Tucker's house.

Tucker had already sensed them coming with his ghost radar build into his PDA and meet them at the door.

"You got yours?" he asked and Danny showed him his letter, "accepted to Wisconsin – you?"

"New York," the geek grinned widely and the two bros made a dance of victory.

Dani shook her head, "boys."

They texted Sam and watch her arrive in her car with a letter in hand, "based on your bright cheeriness, I say you both got accepted. Congratulations nerds."

"And you?" Danny asked and jumped into the car along with the others. He crossed his fingers behind his back and a mantra ran like a band in his head. *Please be Wisconsin, please be Wisconsin, please be Wisconsin, please-*

"Washington."

Tucker and Dani cheered, but Danny felt his words get stuck in his throat. Sam smiled, but sent him an apological look and turned back to the road with a sad frown. Danny snapped out of his own misery and faked a smile, "hey, let's celebrate it – The nasty Burger on my account."

Sam gave him a worried look, but both the back seaters thought it to be a perfect idea and rooted "Nasty! Nasty! Nasty!" all the way to the fast-food restaurant.

They found their old stall and ordered the usually. A salad for Sam, a double big burger menu for Tucker and the normal burger and fries' menu for Danny – and therefor for Dani as well.

Normally Dani and Danny would eat in the same phase and way, complete with finishing their last fry on the same time and all – but Danny had no appetite and fell behind in the consuming race.

Sam seemed to notice and pushed her salad around, “cheer up Danny, it’s not the end of the world. There’ll be the holydays and prolonged weekends. We can skype and hangout in the summer.”

Danny knew she were right, but she sounded more comforting than believable, “I know, but it feels like the end of the Phantom team to me.”

“Talking about self-pity,” Dani noted sarcastic, “what about me? I’m *fifteen!* Too young to go to college or drive a car. I’m gonna die of loneliness back here!”

“Actually,” Danny said, “I think I’ve come up with the solution to that. What would you think about living with Nightshade?”

Dani raised an eyebrow, “is this the ‘please move out’ speech? ‘cause there’s easier ways to tell me to get lost, cuz.”

Danny ignored her sass, “she’ll be back in time to be there when we move and trust me, you’re going to have a great time with her. She’ll totally get you.”

“I don’t know…” Dani hesitated a little and Danny played his trump.

“She’ll train you and make delicious pancakes every morning.”

“Okay fine, geez,” Dani said with an offended pout, but Danny knew it was just a façade and smirked.

“Well, that cleans the last of our issues,” Tucker concluded and rose his cup, “to the future of the Phantom team and Ghost getters, and all that – we’re going to college and some of us Scandinavia, cheers!”

“Cheers,” the others chimed and Danny looked around them. All their classmates and students of most of Casper high were in the Nasty Burger to celebrate or show of their college acceptances.

He even though he heard something about Dash receiving a football

scholarship for college, down behind them.

“For good ol’ friends,” Sam finished and Danny sighed.

“Yeah…friends.”

“I guess now could be a good time to clear some things out and say some last meaningful tings before the exams and graduation rolls over us,” Tucker said and sent both Danny and Sam a knowing glance.

Danny felt his mouth dry out. Should he do it?

Sam’s cheeks turned crimsoned and suddenly she stated to pack her empty salad tray away, “yeah, ‘cause you know the saying, some things are better left unsaid’ – wait no, ‘left said’, not unsaid…I mean -”

She continued to babbling and Danny felt the tension rise, while Tucker and Dani watching them with anticipation and turning heads as if they were a tennis match.

Could he do it?

“– and it not like we can’t see each other, just because we’re spread over the country, Danny can duplicate and someday make those portals –”

“Sam,” he started, but fell for deaf ears.

“– I mean, we’re such good friends, right? If we have something to say, we would have done it years ago and as friends –”

Danny slammed his fist down on the table, “god dammit, Sam, I don’t want to be friends anymore!”

Sam froze as she had got up from her seat and Tucker and Dani watch him in shock along with the rest of the Nasty Burger. Normally all that attention would have bothered Danny.

But right now he couldn’t be bothered.

He inhaled and rose from his seat to stand before her, “I want to be more than that.”

Danny found the old class ring in his right pocket and pulled it out for Sam to see, “I know we won’t get to see each other much after summer, but I have wanted to ask you for a long time and I –”

Sam answered him by kissing him and Danny forgot all about the rest of the place, the town and world, as he responded and placed a palm on her cheek to deepen the chaste kiss.

Somewhere someone was applauded and whistling at them, but none of them gave a damn and they took each other’s hand, when the kiss ended.

“Wanna ditch the bill on Tucker?” Sam asked and Danny grinned. Sorry Tuck.

The geek didn’t seem to mind one bit and waved after them with a shit-eating grin, “run, be free you two loving slowpokes!”

The both ran out the door and Valerie, who had just arrived in time for her shift, looked after them with surprise, “did that just happen?”

Back at his table, Dash Baxter sighed dreamily, “ahh, loser love.”

“And money!” Tucker suddenly realized and jumped to stand on top of the table, “alright people! They got together before graduation and Danny asked her first – you all owe me five bucks!”

Everyone in the Nasty Burger groaned and started to pull out their money. Valerie rolled her eyes and placed her part in Tucker’s waiting hand.

Chapter 12

Notes for the Chapter:

> Hello from the other side!!!!!!
> my exams is almost here and i can't wait to get over them and breath again
> hope you people still enjoy the story
> leave a comment if you feel like it

Vlad Master had always had a love for perfection.

Not the cold beauty of something’s existents or the grace of symmetry. No, in the half-ghost’s opinion, perfection were the effectiveness of an action.

The uplifting sense of knowing that an act was so carefully conceived and executed, that it ceased to be manmade and became supernatural in its graciousness. Vlad had always appreciated perfection.

To live and observe it all around him. It was all around him, really.

A perfectly planned trade.

The satisfying effectivity of his company's cooperation and interaction between employees and superiors.

The speed it took his computer to spread information to the rest of the globe and back again.

The increase of his shares in The Soul Center’s investing’s in The Vampire Games and a carefully conceived scheme.

The well-executed tailored cut and design of his suits and the beautiful sound of an oiled clockwork.

All this filled him with a feeling of peace and inner tranquility. Knowing that everything was going as planned and followed its predicted course.

Because that was beauty of it. If you could predicted the ways of an action and knew it to follow your well planned and rightful will, it would be perfect.

Vlad Master knew all this…and *still*.

The plan had suffered no hiccups or delay and no interferences had intervened. He had planned it all down for months and tabled all possible outcomes with great care…

Getting Daniel to assist him in going to the Soul Center.

Freeing Nightshade from her imprisonment.

Getting them together in a close mother and son relationship.

Steal her and heal her back to health.

Bring her to his castle and shape her to his wishes…

Vlad ignored the steaming tea on the coffee table and leaned on his knees with his hands folded in thought. The plan was perfect, no doubt and still as he had predicted right from the start – and yet this were a little *too* promising.

In many ways, he had hoped that she would come to terms with him and with her maturity knowing that it would only be foolish to try to break out or try to fight him.

A docile and kind Arianna was far preferable over an aggressive and furious Nightshade, but still it nagged at him.

Vlad was more than convinced that if he had tried to kidnap Daniel, the boy would have trashed his room by now and use every second to break free of its walls, even if it meant he had to chew his way through the wallpaper.

When Vlad had kidnapped his sister and little friends some time ago, they had tried to escape from the first second and made an unnecessary fuss with their escape attempt and grave provocations and unfair claims of his character.

Vlad scuffed as he remembered Jasmine's accusations. Him? A Narcissist and sociopath? Ridicules.

All of them had been nothing a bunch of furious and angry guest in his home and vandals of expensive interior. Acting like children.

But not Arianna. She hadn't smashed as much as a glass vase or uttered an unkind word.

Vlad frowned. Despite his earlier love for Maddie, he had been in several relationships with women and amongst them a couple of men too. A woman's anger and violated dignity could create hurricanes and was no laughing matter.

Vlad should know – had plenty of enemies in the form of jilted women, who felt he owed them more than a brief relationship and expensive gifts after a one night stand.

He knew he had more than just stepped on this woman's dignity and he knew from experience that she was a rose with poisonous thorns. She could be dangerous and cunning if she wanted.

She wouldn't break just because she was powerless and had proved to more than capable of setting her mind for long termed revenge plans – if her former master had been enough of an example.

Vlad knew getting her onto his side would be difficult in a setting of imprisonments with his as a jailor – but still she showed no loathing towards him. Despite his capture of her and limitation of her powers, she showed him no animosity or anger.

Vlad wasn't naive or gullible. The friendly courtesy – but still extremely polite exterior – could easily hide a raging core, that would stab him in the back at any given time and show its teeth when the time were conveniently for her.

Her powers may be caged by the chip in her neck, but even a caged individual was dangerous. She had responded well to his kindness and smiled to him when he reminded her to do so.

She had acquiesced incredibly quickly with the new routine and been dainty and dressed when he came to her room to lead her to meals

and behaved graciously at the table. Even responded to conversation.

He had gone a step further and first shown her selected parts of the castle before an actual tour. She had at no time shown any signs of flight or planning of something that would look like an attack, but it was still too early to trust her, despite the good results and well behaving.

He had made it a mental rule to keep her close and never out of sight. The chip would stop her from leaving the ground, but he would not take any chances.

Vlad knew the problem rested in the beauty of it all. He had been more than convinced of his powers to bring this woman to his side and that he, with his charm and worth, could win her over and make her see reason.

Anything else would be a defeat on his part and utterly unimaginable.

And it had clearly worked, just a little too well. Smooth and perfect like the play of his violin.

To well. To *perfect*.

Vlad shook his head and rose from the seat. He smoothed his expensive suit and checked his appearance in one of the wide gold mirror. The suite was on he only used for better occasions and tonight would prove if a celebration were in order or not.

His reflection sent him a fanged smile, despite being in human form and he moved to the stairs with confidence in his steps.

Low music from her laptop could be hear in the hallway and he knocked like a proper gentleman and entered at her calm reply; “come in.”

She was sitting with her back to him and securing what seemed to be the earrings he had send up to her room a couple og hours earlier. The empty dress bag that had joined the box of jewels were lying empty on the bed and its content fitting her slim figure rather nicely.

The white dress made her skin shine through with a dark warm glow and the diamonds completed the picture.

“Allow me,” he insisted and took the diamond choker from her hands. She watched him in the mirror, as he secured the silver lock and he took the liberty to rest his hands on her bare shoulders, “lovely, my dear.”

She gave him a polite smile, “thank you, sir.”

Vlad chuckled by that subtle distance she tried to maintain between them and led her to the door with her arm secured under his.

“I’m happy to see you liked the gift, I thought it was time for a little celebration and that called for something more extravagant than your current wardrobe,” he said and placed a small bracelet on her writs.

It blinked and she could cross the room’s force field with him and the bracelet hidden under his own black sleeve. She watched him remove the little technology again as they waked down the hall and gave him an unreadable glance, “celebration, Mr. Masters?”

Another little addiction to her polite play, he was trying to pass through, “call me Vlad, sweetheart – you have been my guest for three weeks now and that calls for a little toast, I would believe.”

He lifted her to carrying her bridal-style, before she could protest and teleported them to the dining room. Teleporting weren’t foreign for her, but she had been a little breathless the first time he had moved her like this.

Now she just untangled herself from his hold without a word and allowed him to pull out the chair for her, before waiting for him to take seat like courteous and nothing more. Vlad let it slide for now and admired her for a moment.

Even without the expensive dress and jewels, she would have fitted in his castle as if she had been born into wealth and luxury.

A trade about her that had caught his eye from the moment she had taken her human glamour on, with its complicated hairstyle and classic taste in clothing. The queen of ghost hybrids sure were

marvelous a sight to take in. And all his.

Temple and Daisy rolled in the feast on serving cards and served them, before letting Vlad select the wine for the meal. Arianna traded a friendly word with Daisy before the servant returned to the kitchen and Vlad nodded to himself.

Another little attractive trade about his guest was her respectful treatment of the servants and good manners. Vlad wouldn't have to correct her in table manner or behavior it seemed.

She began asking to his work as she he expected of her and he took over the conversation as it was routine between them by now.

They had moved in to the third part of the normal conversation, when it seemed that the little half-ghost had reached her limit and turned to him with a serious face.

"Vlad," she began and he encouraged her, pleased by her more intimate denomination and use of his name, "my stay here has been…nice and actually very affordable, seen in addition to the way I were…*invited* here."

Her voice held a lot of unsaid accusation and he tilted his head, wondering if tonight would be the night she showed her true colors.

Her colors, however, remained neutral as she immediacy continued in a more appealing tone, "the gifts are beautiful and this is a lovely dinner. You have treated me like an absolute gentleman and giving me great company…but that still doesn't clear one single question, that I think should be responded with an honest answer for a change."

She gave him a serious look, "why am I here?"

Vlad connected his fingertips. Already planned for this conversation and the various outcomes it would create. Hopefully some of the more positively ones.

"It's rather conveniently you should ask that, my dear, you see," he began in a reasonable tone and followed her every movement closely, "as it is more than clear to you that we share a certain condition, I

have come to quite a discovery that I believe would benefit both of us."

She frowned a little and he let his eyes wander a second, before returning to her hazel eyes, "the discovery left me quit devastating you must understand. I were trapped for a time with adoption, cloning and other little failed attempts to create the family I have always wanted. But I see now that I was too far out, too cocked up in the artificial, when the natural solution was hiding in plain sight."

He smiled charmingly, "you."

Her look suddenly hardened and his words seemed to have ticked something in that little head of hers, but he had predicted this and moved on, "Mrs. Runner had made plans for you to bring her several offspring for her to sell and train as mere animals, but even she knew that our kind can't breed with neither humans nor ghosts. Our species is to advanced and complex for that."

She inhaled slowly and closed her eyes, shutting him out, "I know. She said my chances of motherhood were almost nonexistent. That's why she was desperate to negotiate with you for Danny's genepool…"

Something suddenly seemed to click behind her eyes and Vlad leaned forward, "yes. Even if she had tried a human, she would have come to the same conclusion as I. You and I can only have children with our own kind."

"And then you brought me here," she whispered and suddenly seemed to have forgot how to breath.

She placed a shaken hand on her stomach and seemed to face a minor case of hyperventilation or panic attack. Vlad moved to assist her, but she pushed back and made her chair hit the carpet. She ignored it and him, before moving out on the floor to get some space.

Tried to get herself down with her hands placed over her mouth and back tuned to him.

He had expected that kind of reaction and it was of cause

understandable, but a phase she would have to cross eventually. She would see it his way with time and he liked to postpone that time, while the iron still was hot.

She gave him a glare of burning indignation, when he stepped up to meet her on the floor and he kept a neutral expression as classic music filled the wide room. She scowled like she couldn't believe he would be that bold and moved to slap him.

He seized her wrist before it could reach its goal. He forced it to rest in his hand and yanked her little lithe form against his, "let's turn that passion into something useful, hmm?"

-

Arianna knew that the man had to be mad by now.

She had had her suspicions, but this were without question the scariest and most bizarre that had ever been forced upon her. And she had both seen some and done some shit in her time as slave.

After the rather dramatic departure the first day, she had been turning all the possible outcomes she could come up with in her head again and again. She had liked nothing more than to just turn the whole room into a ruin and shred every dress and accessories the entire place had contained.

Every piece of expensive fabric had seemed tailored to her precise size and look something she would have bought herself if she was loaded.

Destroying her luxurious cage would have let her take out some frustration, but coldblooded reason had stopped her. Trashing the place and act like an insane, wouldn't solve anything, just give her more problems, even if it seemed enticing.

Opposing your master had never benefited any slave and no matter how much he denied it to be the case, he was still the one with the key and wimp in his hands.

He had the control and balance. Attacking him would be impossible for her. She was without her powers and a strength that could move

him – she had to do it the Aikido way.

Irimi. Enter her opponent.

If you wanted to push someone out of their balance and lock them on the floor, where their neck and bones were yours to break and snap, you had to get close to them first, make them seize your hand if possible.

She had tried making a pushup on the floor and found that she might be healed, but out of muscles and steam. She had to build up her human body again and that would take some time if she had to hide it for the new prison guard.

Training to fight him in secret would take time and time was something she didn't have that much of.

So, she behaved and showed her good side – letting him think himself safe. For now.

He had seemed surprised to find her bathed and proper dressed in one of his dresses when he returned the morning after her imprisonment. She had used the distraction to figure out how he crossed the shield without problem and kept him going with smalltalk.

She had caught a short glimpse of a bracelet up his sleeve and had her suspicion confirmed when he hocked an identical one around her own wrist as they passed the door to her room.

She had taken up to play the game of friendly strangers and found that the man liked to talk a lot. She had nodded the right placed and said "hmm", when needed to fool him into false security, while scanning the place that was his base.

It had quickly tuned out that the room weren't underground or in some far-out house in the forest. The place was a fucking castle!

"Sir, you still haven't told me why I am here," she had started a little overwhelmed and he had taken her hand with a chuckle, "please, walk with me. I believe breakfast is in order."

That hadn't really answer her question, but she had let it slide for now, "charming castle, Mr. Masters."

"Call me Vlad, my dear. Yes, I had the castle build on the original resistant of the one I inherited as a success of the Wisconsin dairy king. Three times actually. I liked the cobblestone gothic design of my first castle, but decided to make the second castle more modern and design it in a renaissance style. The third as we see now, is styled after my own design. A matchmaking of both."

He had kept on talking about some renovations and she had studied him discreetly. The first halfa and billionaire of the year…quite the personality – like Norman Osborn with ghost powers and better looks.

He had seemed like the perfect example of a 'man's man' to her – the business type with an alpha yet clever, suave and debonair attitude, that could make most women gloat after him and men want to be him.

Arianna had never been one of those to run after the rich sugar-daddy types like that, or any type for that manner.

She had been too proud and self-aware to worthy anyone – especial any men – her attention back when she was human and always refused her admires any real contact or real relationship.

She had lived and taken care of two males most of her life and now that she was free once again she felt no real motivation to settle down and do that again for a long time.

She had dedicated herself fully to her studies and patted herself for being an independent female individual, that could provide for herself and make her own life choices.

That point of view hadn't changed even in her slavery and freedom became the new goal in her self-awareness and fight for independence.

This man clearly had a plan for her though and she waited patiently for it to reveal itself.

But nothing had happened.

No one had come to get her, nothing had been instructed, nothing insinuated…just him treating her like some kind of guest and lady for some reason that laid unknown to her. She was still a prisoner, that was clear. Just unsaid.

She had been surprised to wake up and finding her red bag by the door two weeks after and been a little disappointed, but nonetheless expected it, when it turned out there were no Wi-Fi or connection to the phone or laptop.

No calling for help or home it seemed.

She had been ready to throw something out the balcony, when she noted the date had moved to Match month. She had been out for months and lost track of time for the second time in her life.

“NOT AGAIN!” she had screamed and flung a pillow through the open doors of the balcony.

The pillow hadn’t made it far (even when it crossed the force field – wait what?) due to the unexpected visitor who had caught it on its way down the castle westside.

The black shade had grinned wickedly at her and hovered to meet her on the rail of the balcony. They were still separated by the shield, but not cut from communication it seemed.

“You’re the shade that always watch over me when I sleep, aren’t you?” she had asked slowly, recognizing the special inky tone of the shade.

Its smile had stretched to a dangerous wideness and Arianna had finally felt whole again. She wasn’t completely alone in this, she still had some part of her ghost-half with her. She had sent the shade away to hide and planned her next move.

But she hadn’t planned for this.

Vlad Masters, halfa and apparently mad-man forced her against his burning body and into a position she knew all too well.

She didn't know how, but somehow the familiar dancing position made her body calm down and he smiled like the arrogant asshole he was and knew he had got through to her.

"You can't dance with me," she warned him gravely, "I don't do amateurs."

"I like to differ," he drawled and moved her to the pace of the music. She felt anger burn through her well-made facade, when he moved her with precise movements and threw her into difficult figures only a well-trained ballroom dancer would know.

She gasped as he made her dip and held her horizontal, suddenly realizing something, "it was you! You were the one dancing at the prom with me and not Danny!"

He laughed with his velvet baritone, "clever, you sure got an eye for detail – what revealed me? The skills?" he asked and forced her into a *Back boleo* and she kicked by reflex.

"The charm?" he asked seductive and yanked her into the *Sentada* and onto his hip.

Arianna scowled, "the *Dip* – it's movie bullshit and only done in show dance. It's not a real tango move."

"Touché," he laughed and the force of his voice could be felt through his entire body and she felt the entire situation finally getting crystal clear to her now. This was happening, he wanted her.

She shivered and that seemed to humor him. She jerked herself under his arm and tried getting his arm locked behind him, but he had seen it coming and used his ghost strength to seize her.

He won the wrestling match quickly and pressed her to the dinner table's edge. Arianna felt primitive fear consume her and tried kicking herself back to freedom and personal space.

That only made her end up sitting on the table, with her legs on each side of the man and Vlad forced her to look him in the eyes. Red piercing eyes that seemed to eat her up.

“I know you are scared,” he whispered hotly and forced her close to him by seizing her hips and force her uplifted skirt back to his body. The low purr made her feel like screaming, “but I promise to make your first time pleasurable.”

He grunted in pain when the dinner fork impaled his hand, but the little victory was short lived, as he forced her down on the table and grabbed her by the throat. She felt the pressure close in and the finer lines of her vision blackening.

Her legs were useless caged on both sides of him and most of the silverware and glass had been smashed on the floor due to the fight. Out of reach.

Vlad smirked, “look at you, my girl. The Ghost zone’s greatest slave pit warrior and now completely under my mercy. If only Daniel could see you now.”

Arianna felt something snap inside of her.

Vlad blinked when she suddenly opened her eyes and his own reflection stared back at him from her massive black eyes. She struggled and digged her little nails into his hands and he watched in fascination as her clenched teeth turned sharper and longer.

The little invention in her neck made a high-pitched humming and the smell of burned flesh reached his nostrils. The sound turned more insisting as the form of her third eye broke through the skin of her forehead and opened itself with sheer force.

All three eyes then widened in pain, when the chip activated its Plasmius-maximus function and shocked her body. Rec hot electricity ran though her little body with blue sparkles and sapped her core back to human form.

It worked as it was designed, but something would seem that the chip had suffered some causalities by her forced transformation to ghost.

Vlad let her go when his own hands was sapped and cursed a snack brand, as he hurried to search for his remote, while she screamed and trashed on the table. All her ghostly features disappeared at once, but

the chip continued on without mercy.

Vlad finally found the remote, put a stop to it and grabbed the gasping and crying mess that was shaking in pain on his dining table. She screamed and lashed out after him, but not as focused as her previous attempts and tried curling in on herself in panic.

“I'll fight! I'll Fight! I promise! I Promise! I won’t stop! Just don’t shock me! Please stop! Please stop! *Please* –” she sobbed uncontrolled and Vlad felt dread replace the fascination.

He had apparently triggered some kind of old trauma with the electricity treatment. He had wondered when her will would break, but never wanted this. Never like this.

He pressed the unwilling woman into his chest and stroked her hair and back in soothing manner. Tried to make her calm down.

She soon stopped fighting and clung to him and cried violently. Vlad guessed that what he was witnessing was the buildup tears, fear, hurt and pain, in her system that had never been allow to see the day of light since her blessing of ghost powers and curse of slavery.

The little woman in his arms soon calmed down and he carried her to her room without a word. Unknown to the man, a little shadow tailed him closely and hid itself in its mistress dark hair just in time to get in to her room, as Vlad pulled out the bracelet.

Vlad felt a short pulse of a ghost signature, but recognized it as hers and thought nothing of it. She had restrained the chip and possible had a little glitz of power, but not enough to use or escape with.

He placed her on the bed and started working with slow gently movement.

She allowed him to remove her heels and jewelries without protest and she closed her tired eyes, as he loosened her hair and ran a gentle hand through it to remove any knots. He let her dress be and tugged her in, before placing a soft kiss on her lips.

She didn’t respond, but didn’t push him away either. Vlad nodded, she had accepted her place. It was a start.

Arianna watched him dazes as he left. First when his signature where out of reach, the shade rose from under the bed and placed itself next to her. She turned on her stomach, push her hair of her neck and inhaled.

“I don't care if I risk becomming an vegetable. Get it out.”

She bit into the pillow and the shade formed a scalpel in its hand with a toothy grin. Eager to take her orders and cut into the skin.

Chapter 13

Notes for the Chapter:

> Hey poeple
> I'm stressed with exsams, internship and life, but I still got time to post for you
> hope you like it, leave a comment if you feel like it

Vlad was in a good mood.

Last night had played out profitable. The cat was out of the bag and the plan working itself out as it should. He had expected a lot of outcomes last night and found the occurred case of event to be the most productive one.

Arianna had shown the first signs of adaption and acceptance of their shared future and he were more than ready to help her settle down and make it enjoyable.

With time and patience, she would even get to like it here and respond with good nature, he was sure of it.

Fetching Daniel would be the next step and make him stay long enough to see that his former mentor would stay by Vlad's side willingly. Showing the boy that he would have to come to them, to be part of the community that was his own species.

The call of belonging and affinity would lead him back to them and convince him to stay. For good.

The half-ghost moved down the hallway with the further planning for the evening running through his head and found his little guest waiting for him on the edge of her bed.

She had clearly been expecting him for a while and he noted the light pink dress and black coat that matched her boots. He rose an amused eyebrow, "my, don't you look beautiful, but I'm afraid the jacket and outdoor boots won't be necessary."

“Maybe,” she responded and to his surprise a little coyly even, “but I thought we could do something different today. Like leaving the castle for a change.”

Vlad knew her flirtatious and amorous tone was too good to be true and all too fast in the procedure. He faked his own cheeriness and folded his hands behind his back, “oh *really?*”

“I like to see the site,” she purred and crossed her legs in order for him to get a glimpse of her stocking suspenders. Vlad remembered that Skulker had called her ‘kitten’ at some point and he had to admit the woman had some resembles with a feline.

The way she watched everything with superiority and moved in fluent movement, was something that didn’t went unnoticed as she passed you. She defiantly had the temper and act like a cat to.

If he had been a human without speed healing, he would have the claw marks to prove it.

He chuckled, “I’m afraid that’s a little too early, dear Arianna. I will have to decline, but we will get there in time, next month perhaps.”

Her smile got wider and inclined toward the maniacal. She pulled something from her pocket, flipped her thumb at him and he caught the little object she had sent his way. Vlad felt how the little hairs rose in his neck and his skin got goosebumps.

It was the chip…that edgy little bitch.

“Oh, *Twinkies.”*

The slip second it took for him to mutter those words were all she needed and she used up most of her energy at ones, as she filled the room with her shades.

Turning it pitch black.

Vlad gasped from the warm and crowded impact. In a moment is was over and he found himself alone in the room, the bed empty. He turned around in his transformation and found his prisoner watching him from the door.

He shot to her and hit the force field like a massive brick wall.

Arianna lost her pokerfaced and burst into a laughing fit and dangled the two bracelets in front of him, but still right out of reach, “you should have seen yourself! HahAHAHA!!”

Vlad already knew teleporting would get him nowhere and hammered on the shield with burning eyes, “you little bitch! You tricked me! You are going to regret this!”

She giggled, “don’t you know the old saying, Vladimir? You can't trust something that bleeds for five days and doesn't die – but you were arrogant enough to try,” she sing-song and turned her back on him.

She ignored his threats and anger, as she transformed into Nightshade and placed her phone on the expensive carpet. She gave him a flirting wink and phased through the ceiling.

Vlad roared after her, “nobody spurns my affection and get away with it, woman! You’re going to regret the moment you rejected Vlad Masters!”

He got no answer and Vlad stared at the phone as the teen-hours video of Mr. Trololo started plying.

“Lolololololo Lololo-LOL!”

“So, you just want me to follow her? Like a prey?...Can I shoot her?”

Skulker felt a moment of hope, but apparently, the god old gods of hunting were absent again today. Vlad Plasmius’ voice almost disconnected his earpiece with its roaring tone, *“NO! I have said it before and I will say it again – She. Is. Not. Your. Prey!”*

Skulker sighed and followed the trail the little female halfa had left behind.

“Alright, I got it – you want me to catch her or put her in restrains? I have the net that only shocks its prisoner to unconsciousness,” he

suggested and his boss turned silent for a moment.

“No that won’t be necessary, just follow her. She’s on her way either west to get back to Phantom or east to cross the North Atlantic Ocean, to return to Scandinavia. Just suppress your core and keep your distance, till we know which direction she will turn to,” Plasmius said and Skulker got him up on a screen on his arm.

“Understood. Follow and observe.”

Plasmius cut the connection and the hunter frowned.

He hadn’t been informed the circumstances around the whole situation, but his employer was clearly furious and the little kitten was on the loos. He suspected a punishment on her behalf and smirked.

If Plasmius killed her, maybe the hunter could get her skin afterwards. He continued the hunt and found himself leaving the country site.

Vlad let the little screen and monitor turned back into his wristwatch and continued his work.

Three other duplicates where hovering in each corner of the room. Shredded wallpaper and wall filling had been scattered on the carpet like snow, as the ghosts exposed the four force field poles hidden in the up corners of walls and worked on the wires.

Vlad growled as his hands were shocked for the third time and continued working with the poles wires and fuse box.

If he used his own electrical powers to redirect the shields force, he could get the tips of his hands into the box and work with the power wires. One of his duplicates burst into flames and coughed a ring of smoke, before continuing on its corner.

Vlad scowled, he had to cut the selected wires at the same time and pattern at all four poles at the same time, if he wanted to get out of here. He began to feel his own impatience slowing down his

concentration.

He was imagining all the ways he could punish her and all the possible ways of torturing her family, when Skulker's face turned back on his wrist.

"I have found the halfa, she is in a human city called 'Milwaukee'."

Vlad had expected her to run without stop, but maybe she thought herself safe enough to stop for a meal? The infernal sound of the smartphone video made Vlad see more than just red and he turned to the door with a snap, "get that thing turned off now!"

The three vultures circled the piece of technology once more without coming to any conclusion, "we've too old for dis, where is the power switch again?"

"JUST CRUSH IT!"

"Alrigh'ed, alrigh'ed."

Vlad inhaled as the annoying music were put to an abrupt end and continued his doings with the wrist watch, "very well. Hid while she finds something to eat and continue follow her out of town."

Vlad waited for the hunter to reply and got nothing, Vlad growled and turned to the watch, "do you copy?"

The hunter turned his head and focus on the screen, giving Vlad a good look at his confused features, *"uhm...yes…"*

Vlad gave him an impatient scowl, "what?"

The hunter hesitated, *"well she doesn't seem to be in a…hurry…"*

Vlad stared at him and the hunter frowned, presumably watching his target, *"she's gone to the movies."*

"Come again?"

"The target seems to be eating popcorn and watching a movie right now. Something named 'Piranha'."

Vlad facepalmed. He was close to tell the hunter that he was watching a duplicate, when he realized…that wouldn't be an option.

She couldn't clone herself into other than shadow interties and since Skulker had spent a couple of months in one of her shades company while hunting her bag down in the ghost zone, he would be more than capable of telling the obvious difference of the hybrid and one of her shadows.

He blinked, tried to get the bigger picture and sense out of this. Watching a movie? Was she completely out of her *mind?*

"It's ending," Skulker informed and Vlad continued his work, as he listened with a lifted eyebrow to the strange tale of Arianna's journal.

"The target had moved downtown and started walking the street in her human form…she picked a human for his credit card…the target has walked into a shoe store…. brought a pair of boots – size 6,5, black with gold ornaments…. moved on to another shop – dress this time… Brought a mocha with extra cream and chocolate…target has walked into a library…continued down the street…. brought a bouquet of roses on the way to the park."

Vlad shook his head in mild confusion, what did she thought she could accomplish with shopping in a city right next to his castle? Was she really delirious enough to believe he wouldn't come after her and drag her back by the hair?

"The halfa has stopped for a street seller – brought a keyring with a name on it," Skulker flew closer and turned back to the screen, *"nametag with 'Vladimir' on it."*

Vlad snorted, if she thought she could get his forgiveness by something this foolish she had to be stupid. Skulker informed him that she had secured the tag next to the little Danny Phantom keyring on her bag and walked into the park.

Vlad found one of the last wires and frowned in concentration.

Maybe she wanted to lure him into a false security and sought to lead him into some kind of trap. The hunter was perhaps a professional,

but even the strongest ghost didn't know how to hide their core signature completely.

She could have detected Skulker and played him for a fool till she could sneak up on him and ambush him.

Vlad cut the wires and the rest of his duplicates followed suit. The shield glitzed into hexagons and fell with a snapping sound. Vlad inhaled and made ready to teleport.

"Stay back, I get her myself," he informed the hunter and disappeared in a mist of green.

The fresh air of the outside hit him first and he opened his eyes to the sight of the park arear of lower Milwaukee. A pair passed his hiding spot closely and Vlad turned invisible, waited for them to pass while he made a plan for his next action.

He stayed invisible and suppressed his core, as he started scouted the lower park area and felt a sense of annoyance as he found his goal. She wasn't even trying to hide, sitting there clearly in sight.

Arianna had taken seat on one of the park benches with her bag and shopping next to her, like some casual woman just fiddling with two bouquets of flowers. Occupied with her work on a flower crown.

Vlad scuffed and transformed to his human half while invisible. He let the power fall as he lowered to his feet right in front of her and she look up in mild surprise.

"Hey, Vlad. That was fast," she just said calmly, as if threatening men popping into her personal space was just another Tuesday evening thing going for her. She even moved her focus back to her hands to continued her work, as if nothing could touch her.

Vlad's eye twitched. He felt the strong urge to yank her up by her slender neck and punch the air out of her, but the park was public and people walked close behind them. She finished the crown of red roses and suddenly grabbed his hand.

He blinked in confusion and watched her with a mistrusting scowl, as she gently forced him to sit down next to her with a serene look on

her face.

He widened his eyes in absolute disbelief, as she placed the crown on top of his head and took the black crown she had made for herself. She sent him an honest smile for the first time since her kidnapping and giggled, “I thought the king might needed a crown for his castle.”

Vlad were now more than certain that the woman was pure crazy. But for some unknown reason he wanted to see the end of this and decided to played along on her antics out of sheer curiosity.

“It surprises me that you haven’t taken the chance to flee, Arianna. It seems like the action a reasonable person would do in your particular situation.”

She snorted in a very unlady manner and gave him an amused glance.

“Oh yeah? And then what? Run back to Danny and hide in his ridiculous thermos? I’m not an idiot Vlad and I’m certainly not naïve,” she stated and adjusted his flower crown a bit, “even a fool can figure out the results of my little situation here. You and I may be both equal strong and powerful in our ghost form, but there is an important difference between you and me. You are powerful in both forms. You have money and connections – I think we both know that the moment I set foot on Danish ground, a gun will be pointing at my brother or father’s head. I could run to any place on this cursed planet and I would still be found sooner or later – either by you or the Cube. There is no use running when all roads lead back to this and I want more in life than a lifetime on the run, Vlad.”

She adjusted her own black rose crown and gave him an encouragingly look. Giving him free range to do as he pleased with her statement.

It was clear that this woman was serious and Vlad could recognize a negotiation when he saw one. He could drag her back and keep her under key and lock, but then he would lose Daniel in the equation and be forced to live with an unpleasant prisoner.

Vlad had started to understand, that if ten years of slavery in the

ghost zone couldn't break this woman's free will, then neither would ten years in his company, pleasant or not. And she hadn't said anything about leaving in theory…

"If 'more' is what you hope for, then I would believe we could make some arrangements, my dear."

She shrugged charmingly, recognizing that the pet names had returned with a rewarding smile, "if you are willing to hear me out and make some compromises, then let's order some whisky and cheese and call this our little island off discussion."

The older halfa smirked, "ah, yes, I remember you tried teaching those students about the Scottish island Eilean a' Chomhraidh. The old Scottish people shipped divided clan-members out there to force them into agreements, correct?"

"Very nice, Vlad. I'm happy to know at least one person learned something in history class. So what do you say? We talk business and sort of our little problems over dinner?"

The billionaire's limo driver picked them up at the park entrance and kept the shopping bags and flower crowns, while Vlad lead his lady for the evening to one of his favorite restaurants.

Vlad took his driver aside while Arianna walked up to the restaurant, "tell Temple that there won't be dinner at the castle tonight, this could take some time. I won't be going to work tomorrow either; I think we'll be sleeping in till at least noon."

The longhaired ghost grinned in understanding. His young human glamor made it easy to forget he was almost two hundred years old and ancient looking under the ghost magic, "have a nice evening, Mr. Masters."

"Goodnight, Sullivan."

The limo drove of and Vlad lead the smaller ghost-hybrid to the front disk.

Vlad often had his company dinner reservations and meetings with business partners brought here for a chat, which had made the staff familiar with him and put an honor into securing him five-star service and privacy from noisy patrons and paparazzi, who always seemed to follow him around in the city.

Vlad knew the waiter from his previously visits and waited as he ran and returned with the manager. The old man smiled brightly, “Mr. Masters good to see them again, let me lead you and your lady to your private table.”

Arianna looked around the expensive interior, clearly impressed and Vlad smirked. The table were set in a private dining room and the manager took their order, while two other waiters got their coats and showed Vlad the selection of wine.

“I will have the usual and that goes for the lady as well,” Vlad stated and received a look from Arianna, who had been looking though her own menu card – but she didn’t correct him and the waiter and manager closed the doors.

“Now,” Vlad began and served her a glass of wine, “let’s talk. Care to explain why we couldn’t have this conversation in civil manner at the castle?”

She crossed her arms, ignoring the wine with a frown, “you needed a reminder that I’m not some damsel in destress who you can play with as you please. You brought this upon yourself when you put up that ghost hunter shield, Vlad.”

“Now that is an unfair accusation, that shield was the only thing keeping you from making a five-storage jump, if you so kindly remember.”

“I was in shock and pumped with medication, and you know it – anyway, that’s not what this is about,” she sighed and took a sip of her wine.

She blinked a bit taken back, quite surprised by the expensive taste, before turning serious again, “I had some time to think last night and I have come to the conclusion…that you were right.”

They both look up, as the waiter retuned and served the appetizer. Arianna took one of her crustacean hors d'oeuvres and waited for the staff to leave again.

“I had abandoned the idea of motherhood, due to the fact that any child of mine would be taken from me and sold to the Cube, but now that I’m free I have reconsidered and I want to have a family.”

That statement both pleased and created little hoped in Vlad, but he pushed aside for now, “but?”

“But…” she continued slowly, “since I can only have a child with another halfa – that means you or…” she made an uncomfortable grimace, “Danny – I can see that I don’t have much choice in the matter, but I still like to have something to say in this whole setting. I want some security and rights for my part.”

Vlad didn’t like the sound of that, but he wasn’t a successful businessman for nothing and knew that a difficult client was still a client, and therefor possible to persuade and get a profitable outcome from.

If all he had to do was giving her some small privileges, in order to make her his queen and mother of his children, it would be worth it.

“I’m listening.”

The waiters arrived with the next plate and the manager served the proper white wine for the light salad. Normally Vlad would smalltalk with the older man, but today he couldn’t get him out of the door fast enough.

Arianna sighed as they left, “what I want is to know I’m not just some breeder to you. That a child between us won’t be taking from me. That I won’t be hold as a slave in that castle – I want a safety net.”

The older half-ghost had figured that much out and started rummaging through his suit.

“I can assure you that I had no plans of separating you from our child or slavery in mind. But If a safety net is all it would take, I like to offer this,” he said and placed the document in front of her.

She took it without hesitation and Vlad started on his meal, while she read the paper closely.

“It’s a marriage contract,” she said and gave him a strange glance, “…why do you carry a marriage contract on you?”

“Well you never know,” he defended and pushed the adoption papers for Daniel further down into his pocket, “satisfied, my dear?”

“I like a lawyer for this,” she said practical, not taking her eyes of the papers, “which brings me down to another safety percussion of mine – If I am to marry you, I have to return to society and see my family. Marrying you in secret gives me nothing.”

Vlad felt the anger from before return, but kept the fire down, “that would require a lot of preparation and unnecessary commotion that I’m not sure I want to risk.”

Arianna opened her mouth, but stopped as the waiter retuned with the main course.

The little woman stared Vlad down as her plate of dark meat and seasoned garniture was served. Vlad picked a red wine for this and took the time with tasting and approval, before letting the staff leave.

Taking his sweet time, knowing that it would drive her further down into her own spiral of anger and make her easier to control. The wine she had consumed without more than ice-cream, coffee and an appetizer in her system, was beginning to do its magic to.

Normal human alcohol had no effect on half-ghost species what so ever, but Vlad had sent an invisible duplicate to the kitchen, letting it fixing their bottles with ghost alcohol from the minibar in his limo.

Arianna had begun to eye her wine suspiciously, but didn’t comment on it. She was blushing slightly and sounded a little high pitched as the waiters left.

“Well maybe it’s something *I* want to risk. I want to return to Denmark at least one more time in my life and stop hiding from the world. I want my life back, but that doesn’t mean that I can’t have a life with you, just not caged in your castle like some exotic pet. And

just so you know – this contract is worthless."

Vlad rose an eyebrow, "care to explain?"

"It's for humans, Vlad. A human marriage ends when one of the parts dies and you and I are both half dead already. At best we would only be married in our human forms and as good as nothing in our ghost form. I don't even want to think about what that would make us then one is human and the other is in ghost-form – this contract doesn't apply to our species. We would have to make one from scratch in the Ghost zone and with a supernatural judge to testify and sign it."

Vlad leaned forward and forgot all about his developing plans, "are you…asking for a magic contract?"

Her determined face told him all he needed to know and Vlad felt like he had just been giving the deed of a rival company, without as much as leaning their company name.

Given a sacred artifact, without even reading up on it.

Bestowed a victory without a fight.

A magical contract was a dangerous power that would bind any paranormal intertie to the rules of its unbreakable seal. Most had to be signed with blood magic, or took the clients soul in mortgage.

Vlad had seen and read about this in the Ghost zone and witnessed it practiced in the Soul Center. What she was proposing, was an unbreakable marriage between them and a completely binding between them forever.

Divorce or running from him would be impossible. She was practical handing herself over on a silver plate.

Vlad pushed his long forgotten food aside and pulled out his phone. Arianna watched him as he dialed a number and got through, "Vosper, I need a blood contract – Marriage, yes."

Arianna's eyes widened when the entire floor cracked open in a flaming havoc and a timid suit clad demon jumped out of the burning crack and dusted off his expensive suit.

The little red-skinned man grinned with polished tusks and a gleam in his little white eyes, “Plasmius, always a pleasure – finally found the perfect company for your lifetime? I put in an adoption contract, if you promise me the soul of your firstborn.”

Vlad ignored the demon’s wits and turned to his soon to be bride, “a marriage contract sealed and signed in blood should do the trick, I say. Vosper, I believe we are about to make history today – you will stand as the sealer of the first to ever existing marriage contract in the halfa community.”

“Right,” she said a little weak, but composed herself fast enough, “you advocate is a demon, why I’m surprised?”

“Don’t worry, little lady,” the demon smirked and straighten his tie, “I’m a professional – but if I may be frank, you would have to be the wanted Cube fighter ‘Nightshade’, am I right? I take 5 % of my legal fees, if you give me your autograph – it’s for the doomed souls in my pit, not for me of course.”

Vlad cleared his throat and the demon got the hint. Vosper pulled a black contract out of his briefcase and took a bold seat between them at the table, “ladies and gentlemen, any issues you want set out beyond the usual?”

Both half-ghost found themselves mentally exhausted and slightly drunk five hours later, as the last issue in the contract had been noted and all loopholes controlled and disarmed to everyone’s satisfaction.

The issues about the matters of their firstborn had been the most difficult part of the contract and they had yelled at each other for nearly an hour to get the last word in the case of the right to choose the forename alone.

Vosper performed the appropriate rituals over the contract and held a knife to Arianna.

"Just sign here, here and here – that’s for human blood and this one is for ectoplasm," he instructed and she threw her neck back to drown the last wine in her wineglass, before cutting her hand with the knife he had handed her and repeated the procedure as Nightshade.

Vlad did the same and they both stayed in their ghost form to get a little sober, as the signatures dried into the black paper. The demon handed them a copy without further fuss and made gesture to make his leave.

Arianna signed a napkin for him and the demon nodded to them both, before disappeared down the flames in the ground, the same way he'd came. The crack sealed itself as had it had never existed and a soft silence fell over the dining room.

Nightshade rose with grey colored cheeks from the table and placed herself astride on his lap with a smile.

"So, let make it official – my bedroom or yours?"

When the waiter arrived with the dessert, he was surprised to find the room empty and the precise bill and a generous tip on the table. He shrugged and returned to the kitchen.

More dessert for him and the other waiters then.

Chapter 14

Notes for the Chapter:

> Hello people
> my exams are coming up and I might not be able post the next chapter on time because of them - but we'll see
> hope you enjoy - leave a comment if you feel like it

“This I bullshit.”

“I know, dude…”

“It’s complete bullshit!”

“Danny, we know.”

“It’s bullshit!”

“We know!” Sam and Tucker yelled and Danny had to grab his ear in slight pain. Pointed to the TV accusingly.

“Look at her, that smile is both forced and fake and they’re all just eating it up!”

The news had been out all morning and Danny had almost missed it when he had arrived from school and walked past the living room, where his parents were sitting in front of the TV.

Danny despite his clouded thoughts and tiredness, he had stopped his walked for his room, his brain warning him that something was of by the sight of his parents. His parents never sat down to watch TV.

Never.

His father was dialing like crazy on his phone, while his mother just stared at the screen with disbelieve. Danny had joined them to aske who had died, when the news had suddenly showed a smiling

Arianna.

Danny remembered being shocked by suddenly seeing her on the screen, awake and healthy and entirely sane. He almost lost his shit in front of his parents, when Vlad Masters had moved into the frame and placed a possessive hand on her hip and tucked her close to his side.

As the news went on, Danny had sat down in the same state of disbelieve and openly denial as his mother and both ignored Jack, who was having a difficult time calling his old college buddy.

“I can’t believe V-man finally found himself a girl and a celebrity nonetheless – that woman is on the global news!”

“That’s because she has been held captive for ten years, dear,” Maddie replied half focused and scrutinized the screen, “ I can’t believe Vlad would fall that low. How can he take advantage of a poor woman like that!?”

Danny had froze and turned to his mother slowly. She knew?

“What do you mean, mom?” he asked calmly to disguise his nervousness.

Maddie Fenton gestured angrily at the screen where Vlad grinned and showed off his lady for the camera, like some price trophy.

“The captivity, it’s all his fault and now he’s taking advantage of her. That poor woman met him once when she’s was on a study visiting Wisconsin for the first time traveling outside of Scandinavia and then suddenly finds herself kidnapped by some group of blackmailers, who contacts Vlad and demands a million every month or she’ll die. And instead of contacting the police or call the authorities, as he should have, he just pays the money like it’s nothing and keep it secret for teen years!” she ranted angry while Jack moved to the kitchen get better signal.

“And all while that was happening, he was acting as nothing and –” she made sure her husband was out of hearing range and whispered to Danny, “flirting with me! The only good thing about this, is the

fact that his money could buy the best investigators and track these men down. She must have been in a living hell for a decade and now he suddenly wants to marry her? How can he take advantage of an emotional destressed woman like that!?"

Danny almost choked at the *marry* part and stared horrifying at the screen.

"Son of a bitch," he whispered and his mother nodded agreeable, although not for the same reasons. Danny didn't waste time and dialed his friends on the spot and tried to calm down.

Vlad had broken his word, which shouldn't have come as any surprise, but it still burned Danny's cheeks with shame. How could he be so naive to trust Plasmius – *again?*

Sam and Tucker arrived exactly twenty minutes later and placed themselves before the screen in his living room and followed the developing news besides him on the white couch.

Sam placed herself next to Danny and let him wrap a hand around her, "it's a good alibi though. He just has to set some small-minded people up as the blackmailers and get them to confess they kidnapped her. It's pretty much bulletproof."

"Only if she testifies it as true," Tucker pointed out and Danny frowned.

"She would if she's under mind control. It could be the shards from Freakshow's broken staff he once tried using on me."

"Her eyes are normal, dude. He could have just forced her or threaten her to. Maybe her family is in danger. He could be threatening to kill them."

"I don't think that's it," Sam said in thought, "to many people is watching them. They just said that she's returning to Europe to be united with her family. There's way too much media and paparazzi following them for him to make a stunt like that. He would be better of just to keep her a secret than come out like this in the open."

"It's still bullshit," Danny grumbled and Sam started massaging his

neck to make him calm down. Nothing seemed to have change since they became an official pair, other than they could follow their little urges now and touch, kiss or hold hands without tension.

Sam still talked to him like she normally would and Tucker still hung around as always – they were just sitting closer now and spend more alone time together.

It was pretty much as Arianna had said; their friendship hadn't taken any damage just because they were dating. Danny found it actually more relaxing and natural as it was now.

Like they both had been a pair all along without realizing it.

Tiffany Snow smiled bright on the screen, *"the PET and FBI is still working on the case and has just confirmed that the kidnappers are captured and under arrest, but their identities are still unknown. We will follow the story as it develops. Our reporter in the field is reporting from the residence of the famous billionaire and now engaged mayor of Amity Park." Snow winked to the camera with a knowing red painted smile, "sorry girls, but I'm afraid the mayor is no longer free on the marked – and we have Lance Thunder in the studio. What can you tell the viewers, Lance?"*

The blond weather-man and now exclusive new reporter, was busy having his face and hair powdered and hurried to push the makeup girl out of the spot, when he discovered he was on air.

"Only good news," he reported cheerily and placed himself in front of the gates to the castle, along with the other reporters and paparazzi who fought to get space, *"we know from the police conference last night, that Miss. Vølver has been living with the mayor since she was freed three days ago and will be leaving the states to return to her awaiting family back in Europe in her fiancés company."*

The swarm of camera and news reporters erupted into a flashing and tearing crowed, as a limo drove up from the castles underground parking ground and the gates opened automatic.

The camera shook violent and Lance Thunder hit several paparazzies with his rode microphone to get to the limo first, as the tinted

windows rolled down. Several microphones were almost thrown through the window, where Vlad and Arianna leaned out.

"Mr. Masters! Why did you insist on holding the kidnapping a secret and uninform the authorities?"

"Did the kidnappers state any kind of mutilation of your fiancé, if you refused to pay the ransom?"

"Miss. Vølver! How long has the engagement been planned?"

"Was it love at first sight or did your relationship develop during the kidnapping?"

Vlad smirked and Arianna shrugged with a smile, letting him answer, *"as we told back at the police conference, I didn't alarm the authorities or family due to the threat that Miss. Vølver would be hurt if I did. Our relationship developed over time with the exchange of letters and phone calls throughout the captivity – all traces that my private investigators used to bring her back safely from captivity. But she's a wonderful woman, so what can I say?"*

Vlad chuckled and worked his charm on the reporters to Danny's great disgust.

"I would say that went both ways," Arianna said coyly and everyone shared a glance in the Fenton living room, *"we are going to get married in Copenhagen and have a jet to catch, so I'm afraid this was all the time we have for you."*

The limo's couple shared a chaste kiss and was flashed by the cameras as the windows rolled up.

Sam turned off the TV with a face of distaste and faked a vomit attempt, "I haven't been this disturbed since Walker and his minions overshadowed Kwan, Paulina and Dash, and rehearsed the Fenton ghost hunting theme song with your parents. Including that perfect split and choreography."

Danny recalled that picture and writhed, "thanks for that image, babe."

“Don’t mention it, sugar,” Sam grinned, but returned to her serious face, “alright, let’s do this.”

“Already done it!” Jack boomed from the kitchen and startled the teens. Maddie arrived at the stairs, “done what?”

“What is?” Jazz asked loudly from the phone in Maddie’s hand.

“This is!” Jack said triumphantly and showed the house phone in his fist, “V-man finally got through the line and guess what!? We’ll invited to the wedding! Pack your bags and ghost weapons, ‘cause his private yet arrives in an hour!”

“No way!” Maddie, Jazz, Danny, Sam and Tucker gasped in unison and Jack stuck the phone into Danny’s hand.

“Yes way! And he wants to talk to you, son!”

Jack ran off faster than Danny could protest and his mother ran after her husband with the unwilling Jazz on the phone, *“wait no! Mom, give me to Danny!”*

The three teens stared at the phone and Danny almost dropped it when a female voice came from the other end of it, *“Danny? You there?”*

“Arianna?”

“Hey Danny! How are you?” she asked cheerily and Sam snatched the phone from her bashed boyfriend.

“Arianna! If Vlad’s next to you, say ‘that’s nice to hear’!”

“Oh hey Sam, is Tucker there to?” she continued and Sam dodged Danny’s hand, as he tried to recapture the phone and got them both tangled in the curly phone-wire.

Tucker won the silent fight and snatched the phone, “I’m here, why haven’t you called us?”

Sam and Danny lost their balance and hit the floor with hard thud.

“What was that?”

“Just Sam and Danny rolling on the floor – they’re an item now by the way, isn’t it great?”

A loud happy screech replied from the phone, *“no way!”*

“Yes way!” Tucker grinned and was forced down to the others level, when Danny phased Tucker’s legs through the floor and made him stop at the hips.

“Tucker, our relationship isn’t the topic here! We can celebrate when we crash the wedding and steal the bride!”

“That would be reckless at best and idiotic at worst, little badger,” came it with a deep chuckle from the phone and Danny took control of the it with an angry glare.

“What have you done to her, Plasmius?”

“Other than saved her life and placed a ring on her finger? You're almost eighteen, my boy, I think you can figure the rest out by yourself,” Vlad laughed patronizing and Danny felt his eyes turn green.

“But for the minute, my faience is making sure her cat is safely in her transportation bag and I took the liberty to take over the conversation, as you can hear.”

Danny noted the ‘took’ part and wondered if Vlad kept her in a transport-box as well.

“You gave her your cat? That’s a new low, even for you.”

*“I gave her my **sister’s** cat, there’s a difference there, Daniel,”* Vlad corrected him and the teens rolled their eyes.

“Whatever, Fruitloop – enjoy the peace of distance, ‘cause the second I get there, you gonna be sorry you ever broke the truce!” Danny promised incensed and could hear the smirk in the other end of the line.

“We’ll see, Badger, we’ll see,” the older halfa replied assertively and

suddenly talked out of the phone's hearing range, *"– you sure? We'll I have the wedding planner informed in a second, then,"* Vlad pressed the phone back to his ear, *"well, it seems my bride to be, has changed some planes, my boy. Miss. Manson, Grey and Mr. Foyle is invited to the wedding as well. Make sure they arrive at the airport to get on the yet in time."*

Vlad didn't sound all that happy about it and Danny pressed the phone to his shoulder and turned to the others, "Arianna has lured Vlad to give you and Val an invitation to the wedding," he whispered and a rescue plans was already showing in their eyes.

"We'll bring Dani to," Sam said and texted the little halfa, "Arianna doesn't know about her, but she could help break whatever spell or clamp Vlad has on her."

Danny returned to the phone and grinned viciously, "we'll be there – If I was you I would wait to open the caviar, Fruitloop."

He ended the call and found Valerie's number.

They had a huntress to fetch.

-

Copenhagen turned out to be a lot different than the Fentons and companions had expected.

Danny had once been writing an essay after reading the book, *Gulliver's Travels* and now found that he was driving into some sort of Lilliputian land himself.

The city was the smallest capital he had ever visit and compared to his home back in the states, this place was a mix of modern architecture and low buildings looking old, if not ancient.

The tallest building was nothing near six floors and there was no RVs or bigger cars in sight. Danny watched as a group of bikers passed the limo's window and they seemed to take up the city space equal to the amount of cars.

"How can those people stand running around in summer clothes,"

Valeri complained and tucked her light jacket around herself, “it’s freezing out there!”

“It’s the combination of the close sea and golf stream weather,” Jazz lectured self-important and flipped to the next page in her *'Guide to Denmark. Goddag!'*, “it says here that the Danish people will go to the beach and harbor to skinny dip already in March, sunny or not. Must be because they’re surrounded by sea or something. Or maybe the old Viking culture?”

“Hello, mermaid land,” Tucker greeted with his face pressed to the window like a happy puppy, “if all those blond skinny chicks are going to the water, I guess I don’t have other choice than to follow.”

“Yeah, I’m gonna stop you right there,” Valeri warned and showed him Dora’s number on her phone, making him sober up quickly.

Sam was enjoying the view to, but for other reasons.

“I don’t know, it’s pretty refreshing seeing so many people using green transportation. And the streets are so clean – remove the many hotdog stands and people drinking beer in broad daylight, I could actually consider having vacation here,” she said and tried to ignore Mr. Fentons collection of tourist food.

Maddie had made the driver stop in order for Jack to buy from several of the hotdogs sellers and little pastry shops. Apparently the danish food pyramid was made of pork and sugar, suiting the ham and fudge loving man just fine.

“They so small, but cheap,” he said in amazement and tried the danishes with his wife. Danny had lost his appetite back at the private jet.

The pilot was the same ghost who had made him and his mother jump out of a plane back when Vlad had tricked them to visit him with the fake symposium invitation. Maddie haven’t recognized him and Danny had spent the entire flight watching the pilot like a hawk.

Just waiting for him to pull a similar stunt and reveal that Vlad had tricked them again.

But the jet had landed on time in the Danish airport and the pilot had moved on to the awaiting limo and a second car to carry their luggage. That didn't mean that Danny trusted the guy one bit and he'd continued his guarding with the rest of the limo's Ghost getters.

The invisible Dani was still sitting next to him and Danny had the hunch that she was staring out the window as well.

Eager to get to their destination and meet a certain someone.

Danny had promised her that he would introduce her to Arianna and ask her to be her new caretaker and mentor. But that was a promise he had made when the other halfa had still been in coma and no wedding bells had rung.

Now that Arianna was in Plasmius' claws, none of them knew how this would end. There was a huge chance that Dani wouldn't get to have her promised future plans fulfilled.

Danny shook his head, forced himself to have hope. *Get it together, Fenton.*

Everyone in the limo stared when the sky suddenly broke and heavy ran filled the street. As on an unspoken sign, the people on the street pulled out umbrellas and continued their businesses as nothing.

The rain stopped again a second after and the people packed their umbrellas away again to unknown hiding spots.

Tucker shook his head, "freaky."

The tour through Copenhagen's streets came to an end and the limo pulled up to a huge white building, looking like some classic box mansion.

The pilot and driver rolled down the screen between him and the passengers with a wry smile, "welcome to *D'Angleterre*, the hotel where you will be staying and spending the week. Don't bother with the luggage, just enter."

The long-haired ghost grinned smugly and hid his eyes behind the pilot shades. Danny gave him a foul glance and followed the others to

the hotel's entrance. Vlad Masters himself awaited them in the foyer with a team of suits and wedding staff around him.

He waved them off the second he caught sight of his guest and walked up to them with his signature smirk and the poise of a generous host.

"Jack, Maddie, good to see you," he took their hands and Jack forgot all about his hotdogs.

The promise of reuniting with his good 'ol college buddy had made the man as giddy as a child on Christmas eve and made him bounce in his jet-seat for hours.

"Vladdy!" Jack grinned and almost crushed the slenderer man's spine with his bear hug. Maddie had been suspicious and tightlipped most of the trip, but smiled now behind the hand covering her mouth, "dear, please, you're crushing Vlad."

Jack let him go with an apologetic look and Vlad smoothed out his suit, "that's quite alright, its long time no see, after all."

He smirked and caught sight of the group of unimpressed teens behind the ghost hunting couple, "ah, and the little gang is here to. Made the trip in one piece?"

Danny eyed him, "well you never know when the pilot looks like he could be half dead, Vladimir. I almost expected to find name tagged parachutes and personalized gift baskets on that jet to."

"Indeed," Vlad said unphased and snapped his fingers, "but don't you worry, my boy. The gift baskets are taken care of."

A group of suits stepped forward and handed them all their baskets. Sam paled when one of them had the name 'Dani' on it. Danny took it before his parents saw it.

While his parents cooed over their baskets and smalltalked with the host, Danny saw his chance and left a duplicate in his place and moved away invisible. The others didn't notice, to busy searching their baskets for traps.

Even the invisible Dani was too busy to care, fighting as she was with Danny's human duplicate to get some of her baskets content, in order to use Vlad's face as target board.

Danny knew sneaking off probably would be a bad idea, but he had felt a dark ghost signature a second ago and followed his intuition. He almost froze when Vlad – still talking – suddenly stared right at him and continued to follow him out of the corner of his midnight eye.

Danny suppressed a shiver and hurried to phase out of sight and deeper into the hotel.

He found himself in a wide white hallway and closed his eyes. His core resonated, his own ghost signature stood clear before him as an ice-cold light and Danny reached out to find Nightshade's.

He extended the range and waited.

Four known signatures revealed themselves before his inner eye. An ice core (Dani), an electric fire core (Plasmius), his own and the dark core he was searching for. But they weren't alone. At least six other ghost cores shone in the darkness and Danny recognized them all.

"Why would he bring Spectra, Kitty and Ember here?" he mumbled confused, "to be the *bridesmaids!?"*

His ghost sense warned him along with his ghost resonance and Danny shot forward in panic. Plasmius burning core was coming right at him and the older halfa appeared down the hall with an ominous laughter.

He caught sight of Danny like an predator and shot forward with extended claws.

Danny's first instinct was to flee, but he had expected this. Unless he killed or permanently stunned the older halfa, they would never get Arianna out in one piece and back to freedom.

Danny took a deep breath, faced the older halfa and raised his hand out as to stop the other. Vlad was three meters from him and Danny recalled the feeling in his core that Nightshade had helped him train

months ago.

A green light evolved in his palm.

Vlad's red eyes widened in surprise when a green portal unfolded in front of the half-ghost teen. The older halfa tried to dodge or slow his speed, but ended up in the portal to the Ghost Zone nonetheless and Danny closed it with a snap.

The silence of the hallway almost burst Danny's hearing and he broke it with a laughter of unbelievable triumph, "I can't believe that worked! Whoo!!!"

He shot down the hallways and phased through rooms like a white arrow with renewed determination and finally found the goal. The dark signature was right behind the next pair of doors and even if he hadn't felt her, the three vultures standing guard outside the door would have given it away.

Danny turned invisible and grabbed their tail feathers before they could detect him. He flung them into a new portal like a sack of potatoes, before the birds could comprehend what had just happened and he waved after them as the portal closed.

Danny allowed himself a short victory dance and patted the thermos on his back, "looks like you're outdated, buddy. Revolution is here and it's called Phantom portals!"

He slowed down when he heard low voices on the other side of the door and frowned. There was no other ghost core in there than Nightshade's, but the two voices were way to masculine to belong to the small woman.

Danny phased through the door and startled two suite-clad men. Danny wasted no time and seized them both by the ties and lifted them from the floor, "where is she!?"

The two men stared at him in fright and he was ready to blast them, when a storm of white skirts and laces hit him like a soft hammer.

"Danny!"

Danny lost the grip in the two men and hugged back the bride in surprise, “A-Arianna?”

She released him with a bright smile, but hold on to him with her hands in his, “you came to the wedding! Are the other here to? It’s been so long since I have seen you guys, how are you?”

Danny didn’t know how to answer that.

The first thing he searched was her eyes, but they turned out to look normal hazel and not red, which put the ringmaster’s staff shards out of option.

There was no other ghost signature than hers in the room and no other ghost was possessing here, he concluded, as he didn’t feel other interties though the grip of her hands.

The two suits made a move and Danny pushed his mentor behind him.

“Stay back, you psychos! If you draw your guns I will blast you – don’t worry I get you out of here,” Danny added behind his shoulder and found Arianna on the edge of a laughing fit.

“Danny,” she snickered, trying her best to hold back the laughter, “I like you to meet my father, Lars.”

She gestured to the oldest of the men, who stared back at Danny a little bit freaked out.

The teen suddenly realized that the man was way too old to be a guard and nowhere near the same cold appearance as Vlad’s other suits. The suit itself turned out to be a tuxedo, now that Danny had time to study him.

The white man was a mess of wrinkles and red facial hair that made him look like an old Viking. At least sixty or older and completely harmless. Danny felt his cheeks burn, “uhhh…hey?”

“And this is my little brother, Jonathan,” she continued and fought to keep a straight face.

Unlike their father her brother was dark skinned like herself, but almost two meters and suited the role as a bodyguard far better than their father.

Jonathan and his father shared a glance and the old man tried getting the wrinkles out of his tux with a nervous cough. He gave Danny a critical look over, “øhhh, so you are one of Vlad’s crazy spirit friends?”

Arianna tried with all her might to keep the laugher out of her voice but lost the fight, “this is Danny, he’s a friend of mine and…*phfff*… the weddings best man! *Bhahahaha!*”

Danny hid his face in his hands.

Maybe making a portal right under his own feet and joining a wrathful Vlad would be less painful than this.

Chapter 15

Notes for the Chapter:

> Hey Guys
> my exsams are on to me, but I'll see if i can keep this up and update on time
> hope you enjoy

“So you’re sure you’re not brainwashed?”

“Vlad hates my music taste, but I haven’t changed it, so no.”

“He hasn’t enchanted you with magic?”

“Other than with his good looks, charm and skills in bed?”

“I could have lived a happy live without knowing that” Danny groaned, “and you’re not overshadowed?”

“Aren’t we all? The government is always watching,” Arianna joked and stopped when he gave her a look, “no, I’m still me, Danny.”

“Love Potion then? Electroshock?...brain manipulating chips?” he pressed on in searched for something that could explain the situation for him. She looked normal, happy even, but that didn’t make any sense to him.

Something had to explain this in a satisfying way – like her being manipulated or worse.

“Well, he did implant a chip to prevent me from transforming –”

“Really?”

“Quit sounding so hopeful, kid,” she grinned and tousled his hair, “one of my shades cut it out.”

She turned to Nightshade just to illustrate she had control over her powers and Danny pouted, “then why the hell are you still here? He’s

a fruitloop! Why would you even consider tying knots with a nutcase like that, if it's not forced?"

Danny was getting frustrated and phased his hand through her chest again, just to be sure there weren't some Plasmius duplicate in there.

Danny weren't complete certain if Vlad would go as far as to marrying himself, but you never knew. The man had pictures of himself on every surface whenever he went, damn narcissist.

Nightshade pushed his hands aside with a shiver.

"Ugh! Do you mind, you little snowflake?" she shrieked and almost pushed Danny of the bed, where they were currently sitting.

Her brother and father had left to let them talk under two eyes, but not willingly and Danny could still feel his ears burn. Boy, did he know how to introduce himself or what?

"Then…why?" he asked worried and she sighed.

"Sometimes you have to grow up and face the facts, Danny," she started and glanced to the wedding dress hanging on the closet door, "I took your protection and alliance back then, because I knew there was something wrong with my human form and I would need all the protection I could get from the Cube – and then I kind of fell for you, how could I not? Look at that face!"

He smiled as she pinched his cheeks, but turned serious again.

"But you still have my protection! Plus, you're totally healed now and can take care of yourself, you don't need Plasmius for anything," he scoffed and hoped to get some sense through to her, "all we need to do I beat up Vlad and teach him a lesson. You're not bound to be his anything, even if he saved your life!"

"I know," she replied gently, "but my and Vlad's interest in life kinds of add up to the same, so it's kind of a win-win situation for me anyway – and you have your own life to take care of, Danny. With Vlad's protection and connections in the Ghost Zone, you wouldn't have to worry about me and live your life as you should. And it is as you said, I'm cured, so I'm not going anywhere now."

Danny frowned, this conversation wasn't going as he had planned it out at all. In his head, all he had to do was getting her out of some kind of restraints and beat Vlad up, like the bastard deserved.

Not sitting here listening to her defending the cheesehead and telling him she wanted this freely.

What the actual hell?

"But that doesn't mean you have to marry him!" he yelled annoyed and crossed his arm, sending the wedding dress a nasty look.

"Oh, Danny," she giggled, "I think you misunderstood – I'm already married with Vlad. This wedding is only for show."

"What?"

She searched her purse and gave him a black scroll. Danny got the feeling he had seen this kind of paper before and when the smell of smoke reached him, he recalled the demon woman from the Soul Center, who had given Tucker that perverted note in the elevator.

Danny opened the scroll and found a gothic contract inside, watched a bit worried as it rolled down the bed and down the floor.

He read the tight letters at the beginning and managed to find the end of the teen meter long scroll – he skipped the midsection and focused on the introduction and conclusion.

The teen felt his stomach turn, as he got to the last line and recognized the handwriting made with blood and ectoplasm. It looked fresh, but the black material had sponged it up entirely and left no wet marks behind.

Even the smell was as if it had just been spilled.

"You sold your soul to Vlad!?" he almost screamed and receive a raised eyebrow from Arianna.

"Correction, he sold his soul to *me* and I to *him* – it goes both ways, Danny. The contract is legal for our species only and none of the parties can break any of the rules or down written formulars, without

getting demolish into nothing. We simple can't break the contract, it's my safety in this marriage, that's why you don't have to worry for me anymore," she explained and patted his horrified face on the cheek, "Vlad will be my protector and husband from now and the rest of the eternity."

Danny thought that was a weird way to express her marriage length, but let it go, "so what, he tricked you into making this?"

Danny got an image and shivered, "did he threaten you into signing it? Did he threat your family!?"

"Oh come on, Danny, give me some credit will you? I proposed after all," she rolled her eyes and leaned back on the bed, "and why shouldn't I? He's pretty much the whole package."

Danny packed the contract safely away, the part about demolishing could count if you ripped the paper perhaps, "let me see, hmmm, because he's a crazy, manipulative, psychotic, narcissistic, self-centered, heartless, controlling, scheming, sadistic, evil closet-sociopath and messed up Fruitloop? – and my archenemy, did I mention archenemy? That part is kind of essential."

"Wow, watch out you don't break your dictionary," she commented drily and sat up, "I never got the fruitloop part though – is it an American slang word, or connected to some insider joke? I can't figure out what resembles Vlad has with sweet and colorful morning cereal."

Danny put a finger up, but decided against it, "well…that doesn't matter right now. Don't try and talking aside this mirage disaster, Arianna. It was just a nick name I gave him after we meet and he revealed his true color to me…"

Danny suddenly got an idea and if he had been placed in front of a mirror he would have seen that his reflection had made the trademark smirk of his archenemy.

"…when he revealed himself to me, he demanded me to become his son and half-ghost apprentice – that and he planned to murder my father and marry my mother. He's kind of crazy about her, ya know,

has fought twenty years to get her actually," he added innocently, but instead of the surprised face and maybe yelling fit he had expected, Arianna just snorted and gave him a look.

"I see what you did there, kid. Sorry to spoil it, but Vlad have already told me," she said and leaned in, smiling darkly with a whisper, *"all of it."*

Danny couldn't believe it. Vlad told her everything? That couldn't be right. But then again, the man couldn't hold his tongue for five minutes without blabbering his evil schemes.

"He told you about my mother…alright – what about the part where he lied and tricked me into thinking you wouldn't wake up until after three months? Or the fact that he has choked and hurt me more than any other ghost in the entire Ghost Zone combined and was the one that let Pariah Dark loos? Did I mention he made me and my mom jump out of a loos plane, just to trap us in the mountain and confess his creepy undying love for her?"

"Told me," she replied calmly, "If he weren't over her, he wouldn't have married me, so it's cool."

"Then what about the part where he used all his ghost powers to steal millions and overshadowed millionaires to sell him their companies? The thing about blames my father for his transformation to halfa, even though it was an honest accident and he kind of placed himself in front of the portal in the first place?"

"I know. Hadn't I been this happy for my own powers, I would probably had tried to kill your parents to."

"Okay, what about the whole treating my town and family like his own personal sadistic playground and what about the time that he ran for mayor, just because I made a harmless prank? He even equipped Valerie with her ghost hunting weapons just to hunt me!"

"He said you wouldn't let he train you, so you had to be helped the hard way – but yeah, that's kind of extreme of him. The mayor part is funny though and your kind of asked for it," she grinned well entertained and Danny guessed she was right about the last part.

Teasing Vlad had maybe been one of the stupidest thing he had ever done, but still.

“Fine you’re in denial and heard his part of the story, fake as it is,” he sighed and she gave him an odd look.

“It’s kind of funny though, Danny. The way you speak of him make it sounds like you only know half the man.”

The raven-haired teen scuffed, “you’ve known him for – *what?* Two months and you think you an expert?”

“No, but I’m not stupid and I tell you, that halfa ain’t sublet either. I can see that Vlad is a selfish man with childish and egoistic tendencies and can be extremely possessive and arrogant and –” Danny smiled with lidded eyes and she gave him a strict glace, “you can stop me any time, you know.”

“I know,” he sing-song and she shook her head.

“But he can be very loving and compassionated to. Vlad is a lonely man, Danny and he clearly has a lot of love to give. He wants to build a family with me and he wants you to be part of it to. He cares a lot about you, Danny. That’s why he wants you to be his best man at the wedding.”

“Not gonna happen – ask your brother,” Danny spat and cursed Vlad in his head.

She giggled, “he’ll rather die. He and my father tried killing Vlad, when I introduced them. It was fun, Vlad even had to phase his hands into my father’s chest to restart his pacemaker, when I transformed in front of him. I told them the truth, but tried letting some of the bloody details out of it. They took it better than I had hoped.”

Danny found that he liked the two men almost instantly. He would properly had tried to kill Vlad to, if Jazz had returned after teen years of silence and told she was bound to some pompous smartass, teen year older than her.

“Still not gonna happen.”

She sighed and gave him a strange glance he couldn't decipher, "Danny I know you don't like the guy, but I'm going to spend my life with him and have a family with Vlad. It's not something you can talk me out of, but I don't want this to come between us either. I will still be a part of your life and be there for you. Train you if you let me. Me marring Vlad, doesn't mean I will push you out of my life, but I can't allow you to come between me and Vlad likewise. You will have to reconcilable with him, if this is to end happy for any of us. Please don't make me chose between you two, Danny."

Danny bit his tongue. He didn't want Vlad to come between them either, but how was he supposed to welcome the jerk into his life, when all he had ever done was doing the opposite ever since they meet?

The man was his enemy and all Danny's problems seemed to be traceable back to the man.

"Still not doing it. The jerk made me kill three fairies and told me he was proud of me, I'm not doing anything for him ever again and that goes for being his best man to."

"Do it for me then?" she asked with big black puppy eyes and Danny felt the power of the puppy eyes take hold of him. A third one popped up on her forehead and the power of puppy eyes went the extreme.

"Fine," he sighed, "this can't be worse than the time he jumped back in time, influenced history and tried conquer kingdoms."

Arianna's eyes snapped back to normal and stared at him in horror, grabbing him by the collar, "he. Did. What!?"

-

"This suck," Sam whined and threw herself on the bed in Danny's suite.

Danny sat down and steadied his head in his palms, "I know and we can't break the contract without killing her either."

Sam read through the scroll that Arianna had lent him and scowled,

“this is all bureaucratic nonsense and demonic letters, makes no sense – and I should know, I read the graphic version of the constitution.”

Danny sighed, “that’s why I gave it to you, isn’t there some loopholes we can use in it?”

Sam scowled down the long length of black paper, “let’s see, okay here’s something ***‘its forbidding of both parties to commit suicide or committing a martyr death, if it’s for the purpose of breaking the contract of leave the other party…’”***

They shared a look and Danny continued reading.

“Okay, ***’but should the wish of death be based on an honest sacrifice in order to save the other or their child(ren), then the suicide is permitted, but has to be done with full determination and wish of the other parties or child(ren)’s wellbeing and safety. The husband's right to sacrifice himself will come before the wife’s in all these cases.’”***

Danny felt sick and allowed his girlfriend take over the scroll, “well, that’s really romantic, but what’s with the child part anyway? It’s weird.”

I’m getting to it,” Sam offered and made a grimace, “this is so creepy, I can’t believe she did…”

Danny looked up to see his girlfriend frozen and staring at the scroll, like it had just slapped her.

“Sam?” he asked concerned and she snapped out of it.

“Danny I think I know why she really did it now…here,” she handed him the scroll and Danny read the line she pointed out. He read the fine lines and was ready to give up on the complex rubbish, when he found it.

He felt his guts wince and his mouth dried out. His voice was almost a whisper, “***’halfas can only have children with their own kind’***…”

Sam had covered her mouth and searched his face for a reaction. Danny stared out into the room and tried to calm his troubled stream

of thoughts down. He inhaled and closed his eyes.

He would never be a father.

The fact hit him like an icy needle in the back of his head and he dragged an uneasy hand through his wild hair. The idea of himself with children had of cause crossed him at one point, but he was far too young to considered it for real.

He would probably have waited a couple of years from now, maybe waited for him to have a steady job, car and home for himself. Maybe two kids and…well, yeah, Sam.

The person in the housewife apron had changed a couple of times, but now he was pretty sure it would be Sam – maybe a black gothic apron then. The picture would have made him laugh, if it hadn't been for the crushing reality, that told him this would never be.

The picture was what it was. A frozen picture, unrealistic and now impossible, just a dream and weak hope.

The only way for him to regain the kind of dreams, would be to have it with either Arianna or Dani and the thought of both in that kind of way, made him fell weird and wrong.

"I'm sorry, Danny," Sam apologized and the halfa wondered for how long he had been zooming out. He turned to her in surprise, "Sam, if anyone should be saying sorry, it should be me. I…I know this is kind of far forward, but when I gave you that ring it wasn't just with the thought of some loose relationship or summer romance in mind."

Danny struggled to express himself in a way that made sense, both to himself and to the girl he loved, "I want….I want us to be more than just that….I want to build me live with and around you. The fact that I can't have kids, kind of…" he rubbed his neck in shame, "it feels like I have offered you something broken. I'm sorry."

Sam pressed her lips to his temple in a gentle manner, like he would break and Danny melted into her arms. The soft touches wandered down his cheek and ended at the corner of his mouth like a consoling band.

Letting him forget his worries and shame. He directed her to a deeper kiss with his hands and whished more than anything to just disappear into this loving embrace, that was Sam Manson.

“You will never be broken to me,” she said softly and ran a hand through his hair, “I want that future with you to, Danny. With or without kids, as long as it’s just with you.”

Danny felt a burden lift from his shoulders and pressed his face to her breast. Sam hugged him closer and hummed when he left a trail of kisses down her neck.

“Ew, go get a room, love birds!”

Sam and Danny froze and parted out of habit, before realizing they didn’t have to do that anymore.

Danny turned to Dani with a waving move of his hand, “this is my room – go get your own or hide at Valerie’s, we’re having a moment! *Shoo*.”

“Yeah, no shit Sherlock,” she drawled and sat on the dresser, “I let you to go back to smooching and dry humping as soon as you tell me what Nightshade said.”

Danny blinked perplex and smacked a hand over his face, “fuck! I forgot to tell her about you.”

Sam sighed and fell back on the bed, “just take her to Arianna and come back before dinner. I’ll wait here.”

“I remember to bring milk, when she’s delivered,” Danny joked and followed his clone out.

Now that she was alone with Danny, the fifteen-year-old became a little skittish and unsure, “you really think she will take me in?”

“Of course,” Danny assured her and led her down the hallway, “she owns me for making me Vlad’s best man anyway. I sure she will be just crazy about you.”

The sound of raised voices made both Phantoms froze outside

Arianna's door and Danny pushed the door open just a bit. He gulped. Vlad was back, but looked rather jittery, as his bride yelled at him.

"What do you mean 'you can explain'!? You were the one who sat fire to Rome and not Nero! They found a statue with your face! You've ruined history and one of the most advance civilization!!"

Vlad facepalmed, "oh, *Butter nuts*. Those idiots could learn a thing or two from the Egyptians about erasing people from history."

"And not only did you destroy antic scrolls and precious knowledge and culture – you influenced the 14th Century Ming Warriors and their sacred art! Is there more to discover with your face on it!?" she sneered with black solid eyes, making the older halfa smile a little on edgy and shrug sheepishly.

Danny rolled his eyes, so much for telling her everything, huh?

Dani leaned against the door.

"Wow, that lady is dragging Vlad though the mud," she said impressed and stumbled when the door couldn't keep shut with her weight on it. Danny grabbed her before she could fall into the room and made a silly smile, when both Vlad and Arianna looked up.

Arianna hurried to brighten up and smiled, trying to hide the fact that they had barged in on a heated quarrel and her eyes returned to human, "oh, hello Danny, uhm - who's your little friend?"

Vlad froze by the sight of his former daughter and Danny tried getting Dani with him back out, "uhmm, maybe now isn't a good time."

Dani didn't catch the hint and phased out of Danny's hold and walked up the other female, "I'm Danny's clone – Dani phantom, Dani with an 'I'.

"Hey" Arianna greeted a bit perplex and turned to Danny with a confused grin, "wow, Danny did you clone yourself?"

"Actually," Dani began, but crocked her head a little confused, as

both Vlad and Danny bagan making wild hand gesture behind Arianna's back, shaking their heads panicly.

Vlad made the 'I cut your throat' gesture at her and Dani gave him a scowl, before suddenly smirking devilishly and turned to the female with an innocent face.

"Actually, Vlad did, he called himself my father, but then he tried to kill me and study my remains."

Vlad look like he was going to make a prayer to the forces of the heaven and Arianna turned to him in furious disbelieve.

"YOU HAVE A DAUGHTER!? – WITH *DANNY!?* HE'S A FUCKING MINOR, VLAD!"

It took Vlad around fifteen minutes to calm down his wife and explain himself as gentle as possible. Danny denied all fatherhood of his clone and tried to make the whole cousin thing clear, while Vlad was trying to shut him up and spare her from the deeper details.

Dani watched them in mild amusement and made faces at Vlad behind Arianna's back during the whole situation, not helping the least.

The older female halfa grabbed her head with a sigh, "fine…you ruined most of history for me and I guess I just have to live with that – is there something else I should know now that we're in the confession zone?"

"No everything is reviled," Vlad hurried clarify and gave Danny a stern look. Clearly telling him to shut his mouth, or else.

Danny gave him a nasty glare and pointed at him, "Vlad tried destroyed the world's first airplane and kill the Wright brothers.

Arianna made a high pitched scream.

Chapter 16

It soon occurred to Danny that the whole situation wasn't as bad as it looked.

It was worse. So much worse…

The first dinner at the hotel restaurant had been a two-sided experience, where only half of its guest at the table seemed to know what was going on.

Danny and his friends had given the host nasty glares from first course to dessert, with invisible weapons charged and hidden under the table, while Jack had eaten up every word from his college buddy and nudged his wife every time Vlad had said something he found either extremely funny or insightful.

Maddie had facepalmed when her husband had taken the chance and started a long speech about how honored he was on his family and Danny's behalf, as the best man, to be there. He had then started telling anecdotes one after another about their shared past in college.

Danny had snickered with the others when the wine had started to flow to freely and Jack had lent one of the bride's ears, to tell her the more embarrassing stories from when they were young and wild.

Making Arianna spit her wine in laugher.

Vlad's smock demeanor had exchanged in favor of a horrified face and he had switched seat with Jack, faster than he could plan a new scheme.

Maddie had tried to get her husband under control, while Danny had duplicated and kept his father's cup filled the entire evening with an invisible duplicate – the more blackmail material they could get on Vlad, the better.

Jazz had taken notes, closely watching Vlad and mumbled something about "study of a narcissist in third stat of life – a field study", while Dani had buzzed around Vlad like his own personal poltergeist and

tried to make his life as miserable as possible.

Trying to tip his wine over, flipping his plate into his lap or spiced his dessert with salt and pepper.

Vlad had handled the invisible girl without problem or showing any distress to the rest of the table – but getting rid of the problem had turned impossible, since Dani would fly a millimeter to the left and hide behind Arianna every time he got too close to swat her.

Arianna had watched them all with a face that clearly told Danny she found the entire situation incredible hilarious.

Her amusement only got fuel by the fact, that her brother was doing everything he could to prevent Vlad from touching her, without caring about being subtle, while her father just stared at all the ghostly activity with jumpy anxiety and kept grabbing the ghost-teaser he had gotten from his daughter, every five second like a protecting talisman.

The dinner disaster ended with the old Mr. Vølver screaming, when Dani's last prank backfired.

She had phased her face up through the table and planted her head under one of the silver bell and made a grimace as it was lifted, making it seem like her head was served and served on a silver platter.

Unfortunately, she had hidden under the wrong serving-bell and instead of Vlad, it was the old Dane who had jumped up in horror and flipped the table in the during.

In his drunkenness, Jack had taken this as a Danish table tradition and did the man after with the rest of the table length. Maddie had given up at that point and drowned the rest of the wine bottle, while Vlad payed the confused hotel staff.

The rest of them had hurried to hide their weapons and Valeri had fought with the red suit and board that had popped out of her boots, due to sheer surprise and trigger-fingers.

The circus continued the morning after, where Danny had barely

seated next to Sam and taken a sip of his juice, only to get it stuck in his throat, when his ghost sense warned him. Kitty, Spectra and Ember moved into the restaurant with all their ghostly grace and girl gang demeanor.

Grinned viciously when they locked gazes with the ghost hero.

“Oh great, I forgot all about them,” Danny groaned. Sam and Tucker reached for their ghost gear, when the specter women placed them self deliberately at their table and made themselves at home.

“Well, well, if it isn’t the weddings best man,” Spectra cooed and leaned her cheek on her folded hands. Ember placed her heavy boots on the table and snatched the bacon from Tucker’s plate.

“He only got the job, because Skulker’s too busy hunting to care about wedding speeches,” the rock star scoffed while chewing and tuned her guitar, “I’m gonna drown you out with my baby here if the speech getting lame, Dipstick.”

“Don’t you people have some poor innocent humans to torment and spook on another continent?” he asked tiredly and pulled his own plate back, when Ember tried stealing his scrambled eggs, “get your own, Ember! It an open buffet, you sluggard.”

“What are you even doing here?” Sam asked suspicious and Kitty raised a perfect green eyebrow.

“Isn’t it obvious? We’re invited off course, you thought two halfas would have a completely human guest-list only? Come on. It's the ghost marriage of the century.”

They all pulled out a little cream colored invitation from their pockets, that screamed of money and elegance. A wedding invitation.

Danny, Sam and Tucker snatched one each and read them closely.

To his suspicion, Danny found that there was something on the backside of the invitation, but was distracted by Tucker who gave Ember a look, “Arianna invited you as the wedding singer? Aren’t your style a little to… *teen*-rated to be wedding material?”

The blue haired ghost gave him a sour look and turned on the different functions of her guitar, “I’m working at it, geek. Don’t push me or I’ll make your girlfriend cling to your hero here with my love tunes.”

“Dora's here?” Tucker asked surprised and Kitty pointed to the entrance where Dora entered in her human glamor and following court of servants.

She spotted her lovestrucked boyfriend and squeaked, “Tuckki!”

“Tuckki?” Sam and Danny asked revolted, but the geek had forgot all about them and ran for his president and fiancé.

“Dora-babe!”

“The beauty and the geek, makes the hallway reek!” Ember sang and tuned her guitar experimenting, “hmm, I think I just found my new single.”

“Okay I get why the two of you are here,” Sam stated and pointed to Spectra and Ember, before turning to Kitty, “but you and Johnny13 are Danny’s allies. Plasmius and Nightshade doesn’t even know you, so what gives?”

Kitty huffed insulted, “hey! I’m part of the girl gang too! You can’t invite them without me to, don’t single me out – we’re an item!”

She formed a formation with the other two and the gang switched their ghost forms out with human glamors. All wearing outfits matching the invitations after the each specter’s personal style, “ – and we’re the weddings bridesmaids and bachelorette planners!”

Sam and Danny starred horrified at the gang.

Kitty and Ember had kept their blue and green hair color, but lost the ghostly hue around them and finished it all with natural skin color. Making them look like rebellious punk girls dressed up by their mothers from the country fair club.

Even the guitar had a lace bow. Danny had been right all along. They were the bridesmaids of this horror show.

Danny leaned on to Sam with a whisper, “I fucking called it.”

Valerie walked groggy into the restaurant with her plate of breakfast and juice, but froze in the midst of a step by the sight of the bridesmaids.

“I need something stronger for this,” she sighed and walked back to the buffet to get coffee and possible a beer. Danes really liked beer it seemed.

-

Dani was having a blast.

She had finished her third jumbo sundae and this halfa lady had already ordered one more with a motherly smile. The woman had pampered her all morning and promised Danny to take more than care of her, much to Vlad’s dismay.

The older female halfa was now in the midst of a discussion with Plasmius and as far Dani could tell, the supervillain was losing big time. She could hear them all the way into the living room, where she was watching TV and enjoying her free food.

“Aw Vlad look at her, she’s yours and Danny’s daughter, she’s cold, alone and needs motherly love – and she wearing a beanie for Christ sake. I can’t let you send her away!”

“Of course I can! She’s a nuisance without any real human emotions – I made her myself, she’s nothing but artificial intelligence and human DNA mixed with ectoplasm. I can make several of her if I want.”

“Don’t talk about your daughter like that!”

“She is a clone!”

“So? Your still her father – I can let Danny of the hook, since he’s innocent in this, but you’re a grown man, Vlad, for god sake! Take some responsibility!”

The shouting died down and Dani turned the volume of the TV down to get the rest of it. She had thought it would hurt more to hear those

cold words from her former father, but she felt only a weird sense of hostility.

Like she had expected him to act that way and welcomed his hate as something naturally.

Vlad was a monster after all. She had known that since their last encounter.

Hearing this woman challenge him so openly and fight verbal with him, made Dani all giddy and fussy. She had had her doubts about this halfa woman, being Danny's idol and Vlad's wife nonetheless, but now she was more than convinced.

She wanted to stay with her.

Dani scooped a large bite of chocolate and strawberry ice cream into her mouth and listened to the grownup's conversation. Apparently, Arianna was playing dirty now.

" – if you look right here on the contract, it says red on black that we can adopt if we want."

"That part is only reseated for Daniel, Arianna. She's not living up to the qualifications of our adoptions agreements," Vlad sounded smock again, "if you adopt a child that doesn't fit the contract terms, you will get punished by its magic, my dear."

"Oh really?" Arianna asked in mocking surprise, "then let me remind you of those so-called *qualifications* then – ***'1. The child is blood related/created/natural born/ legal liability tied or guardian bound with governmental approval to one of the contract parties'***. Dani is created by you!"

"The term 'created' was never elaborated or defined," Vlad replied businesslike, "making a clone in a pod doesn't make her my legally anything."

"Well, what about no. 2? ***'The child is natural born or transformed into a ghost hybrid, by the same medical standards or substances as the rest of the ghost hybrid society. (see ghost hybrid definition under species definition, piece 1, part 1.)'***," Arianna read aloud and

flipped loudly to the referring page, “says here that ***‘a ghost hybrid is a hybrid species, with half-ghosts' DNA. That it is a combination of Human DNA and Ectoplasm, created as the result of the exposure to high levels of ghost energy’***. Dani fits this description, Vlad, she’s a halfa alright – just how many halfas is there out there? Other than Danny? We might as well take her in now.”

Dani nodded to herself and scooped some more ice cream, the lady had a point. As little as Dani wanted to be in the same room as Plasmius, the logic about halfas staying together seemed fair.

And who knew? Maybe it would be fun to stay around and spite the man in his open unprepared face. His wife had already volunteered as a living shield. Dani couldn’t get herself to pass that golden chance of sweet revenge.

Technically, she wouldn’t be living with Vlad – he would be living with her.

Hilarious.

“Yes I’m aware, I made her that way,” Vlad replied unimpressed and by the sound, taking the scroll, “but the contract doesn’t bind me or you to adopt such a ghost-hybrid. It says right here, that no parties are obligated to adopt. The point of this union was to have our own child and Danny by our side, or have you forgotten, hmm?”

Arianna huffed insulted, “if that’s all you see in this union? Then me and my breeding parts would like to have you sleep on the couch tonight!”

“You know I didn’t mean it like –”

“Save it,” she interrupted him, “but now that we are talking about breeding, I just want to make something clear to you. Dani is your daughter even if you like it or not, Vlad. And since Danny was the one who unknowing delivered the DNA and you created her yourself with your own hands – that technically makes you her mother.”

Dani choked on her ice-cream and laughed so hard she stopped making any sound and just struggled to get oxygen back in her

system. She already wished she had been in the bedroom to snap a picture.

“I AM NOT THE MOTHER!”

“Then let

me be!” Arianna insisted, “please, Vladimir. She’s all alone and she’s just like you and me – she needs guidance, a home. She needs a family.”

Dani calmed down and bite her lip.

Vlad sneered, “she lost the privilege when she betrayed me. She has only herself to thank for that.”

“You did try to kill her – twice. And before you ask, she told me and Danny confirmed it.”

Vlad seemed to have lost the last of his patience, if he ever had any, “Danielle doesn’t want me as her father, Arianna. And who says she wants you as her mother? Have you even asked the girl?”

“Well, maybe I should,” she challenged, “and know this, if she wants to stay with me – she’s going to stay with me!”

Dani hurried to find a relaxed and nonsuspicious position on the couch, as the two halfas left the bedroom and entered her space. She put up the most innocent face she could muster, “sup?”

Vlad seemed to see right through her and put his hands behind his back with a cold face. Arianna gave him a warning glance and smiled to Dani, “Dani, do you remember when I told Danny, that I would take care of you?”

Dani nodded slowly, showing that she understood. Arianna took Vlad’s arm and he trucked her in with a sigh.

“Well,” she started slowly, “me and Vlad have been talking and we have a question to ask you, Dani. A very important question that you don’t have to answer right away, if you don’t feel like it.”

Dani put the sundae away and stood, “you want to adopt me, right?”

Arianna looked guilty and Vlad whispered, “I told you the bedroom was to close.”

“Forget it,” Arianna whispered back and turned back to Dani, “I know it’s a lot to ask you, but if you rather stay as my pupil, it’s okay for me and –”

“I want to,” Dani burst out. She couldn’t help it.

She had turned the idea over again and again in her head the last two hours and come to a final conclusion.

She wanted this offer. She wanted this.

She remembered her first thought. The first craving that had erupted in her mind and filled her conscience with light.

She wanted acceptance.

The thirst for human contact and belonging had been a natural longing in her and as a duckling, she had placed her starving affection on the first person to fulfill her desires.

Her father.

He had brought her into the world and all the implanted experience in her fully-grown mind of a twelve-year-old had told her, that Vlad fulfilled the description of a loving caretaker.

He had embraced her tiny form with parental love and caring, feed her, clothed her and praised her. He had been her family. She would do anything for him.

But it hadn’t been real, she supposed.

Vlad haven’t created her with the equal desire of love, he had created her as an accident. He had wanted a boy. A son. A stable halfa.

Everything she wasn’t and would never be.

She had fought to keep the old longing down and made herself cold. Made herself distant, even to her own cousin. Danny was like an older brother to her, maybe even more than that, now that they were together again.

He had sedated the need for a time, given her a small taste of what it would feel to belong to something. Really belong.

But Danny had his own family. He had his father, mother and sister. His own place in this cold lonely world. Dani couldn't interfere with that, wouldn't get in the way.

It wasn't right of her. She wouldn't have wished it for herself, more than anyone else. The simple hope of finding a family of her own had seemed stupid, toxic even. Who would want someone like her?

A freak, a clone, a mistake? Who in this world could ever get to understand her and love her exactly for what she was?

"I want to be your daughter."

Arianna took a sharp intake of air, happy tears shining in her eyes. Vlad sighed tiredly, but placed a smile on his face for his wife's sake, "well then, I suppose an adoption is in order, I will call Vosper and have the papers made."

He turned to Dani, hands extended, "come here Danielle."

Dani crossed her arms, "just because I let you adopt me, doesn't mean I forgive you, fruitloop."

Vlad's eyes flashed red, but Arianna put herself in-between, "no fighting, you two. We're a family now and that means everyone has to make an effort in this."

She gave Dani a motherly, but stern look, "Dani, please. Vlad is my husband and your father, I'm sure his sorry for what he's done and I know he will make it up to you."

Vlad eyed her, but seemed to make up his mind, "I'm sorry. Please forgive me, Danielle."

Dani didn't trust him one sec. The man's words weren't a fake dollar worth and she stood her ground.

Arianna placed her hands reassuring on her shoulder, giving her a little squeeze, "Dani, please. I know it's hard to forgive, but we have to start at some place."

Vlad scuffed scornfully, "forget it, dear, the girl has no manner or sense of tact. The only reason she would get near me anyway, would be to steel my wallet."

"You mean this one?" Dani asked with a smirk, waving his black wallet.

Vlad gasped, "you little – !"

Arianna hurried to cover Dani's ears at this point and prevented her from hearing just what Vlad thought about her little street trick.

"Vlad!" Arianna shouted furious and stared at him with glowing eyes. He matched her glare and Dani could almost feel the temperatures rise dangerously in the tight hotel suite.

Arianna broke the staring contest first with an irritable hiss. She grabbed her coat and Dani's hand before walking to the door. Vlad, who had seemed smock about winning the little confrontation, walked after them now with a scowl, "where do you think you're going?"

"Out shopping," Arianna sneered and ripped the door open, "Dani needs some fresh clothes, since she had been wearing this for a week and I need some air to cool down before I bite you or something."

"You're not leaving this hotel, woman!"

"Try and stop me if you want this marriage to be dreadful, *man!"*

Dani made a mocking grimace at the furious halfa and let the other drag her through the door, "see you later, *Daddy!*"

The man's eye twitched incessantly and he'd muttered numerous snack brands under his breath.

Dani followed willingly as Arianna led them into the foyer and out the hotel entrance. Vlad's driver was busy cleaning the limo's mirrors when Arianna opened the limo door and pressed Dani in.

"Take us to Strøget, please," she said polite, but resolute, making no room for debate. Sullivan almost smacked himself with his washing cloth, as he made a surprised salute. Dani snickered from inside the limo.

Sullivan hold the door open for his mistress and jumped in behind the wheel.

"Off course, Mrs. Masters, but…" he scratched his long grey hair and smiling sheepishly, "I don't know what the *Stroeget* is."

"It's the great shopping street down town, the only real one, the GPS can tell you the direction," Arianna said helpful, a little sheepish that she just pulled a language barrier on the ghost and pulled the screen between the driver seat and private sphere.

She leaned back into the expensive seat and exhaled.

"I'm sorry, Dani. You didn't deserve to witness that," she sighed and pulled a flask from the minibar, before she reconsidered it, it was only ten in the morning after all and put it back again. Took a two cola cans instead.

Dani rolled her eyes, accepting the cold cola from the woman, "I don't get it. If you know what he's like, then why did you married him?"

Arianna seemed surprised by the question, but then giggled, "sorry, I keep forgetting you and Danny is almost the same person, he asked me something similar yesterday."

Dani cracked her can open and waited for her answer. She was actually curious, why had this tough pretty halfa woman married an evil douchebag like Vlad? It made no sense.

Arianna smiled content, "I married him because he's a great tango dancer."

Dani frowned, “what? You tied yourself to that monster, because he can dance *tango?*”

Arianna grinned mischievously, “Vlad isn’t some monster, Dani. What kind of monster has his library categorized in tags like ‘paranormal studies’ and ‘knitting catalogs’? No, I didn’t marry him just because he can dance tango, Dani, but because he acts as he dances.”

“You see,” she started carefully, “in tango, the man is always leading the woman. No matter what, as a woman you’ll have to forget all about equality and power – the man leads if the dance is to be working. The best male dancers are mature men, experienced leaders, and alpha males in society. They take control naturally and moves with grace and leadership, they won’t drop their lady no matter what and protects them from falling as a duty of heart. But that’s the thing, tango is a dance for two. If he doesn’t know or understand how to lead with compassion and care, then he can’t be a graceful dancer. The lady might be powerless, but not without subtle control. If he can’t learn to feel her body in the dance and show her his intention without using force, she won’t move with him. Then he can’t lead her. They won’t dance.”

Arianna smiled, a distant look on her face, “Vlad is still learning, but I have danced with hundreds of talented men, but never felt the same connection with anyone like I feel with him. Vlad is all the things a great dancer should be; I see the potential in him. That’s why I married him.”

Dani tilted her head, “so you married him because you like that he takes control over you?”

Arianna snapped out of her thought and bust into laughing, “you could say that.”

The limo stopped and Sullivan opened the door with a grin, “found it!”

“Thank you, I call when we need the ride home,” Arianna said with a smile and patted his arm friendly. The chauffeur lifted his driver cap with a blushing grin and drove off.

Dani followed the older halfa closely so she wouldn't lose her in the packed street, "well, go for you, I guess. But that doesn't mean I'm gonna warm up to him or anything. His still a freaky psychopath in my book."

Arianna led her into one of the shops and started taking clothes down from the racks, "believe me, I can relate to how you feel. When my mother left us with all our money to be with her younger lover, I felt like holding her head down the kitchen sink."

"Yikes," Dani commented, "and Danny says I'm too much, have you seen her since you returned?"

The woman shook her head, lifting a shirt and added it to her collection on her arm, "but I have my shades roaming the hotel's premises. If she gets more than hundred meters near me or my family, they have my permission to pull her limbs off one by one and film it. I actually hope she tries."

"Ooooookay," Dani replied slowly. Making a note for the future, not to piss off this halfa. The info about the shades made her curios though, "hey is it true that you can't duplicate and those shades have their own life?"

The other didn't seemed offended by Dani's snooping and held a shirt up in front of her, "they are still loyal to me, but yes, they can act without my knowledge. But they tell me things and I see what they have experienced when we fuse again."

She suddenly smiled coyly, giving Dani a knowing look, "one of them told me you have a crush and on Valerie Grey."

Dani felt her cheeks get warm and crossed her arms dismissive, "we're just friends, it's not like that."

Arianna just shrugged, "I think you two would be a nice pair. She thinks you're cute by the way. You're all over her diary."

"Really?" Dani found herself asking a little too quickly. Embarrassed, she tried turning the conversation to something else and frowned at the clothes the other had found. It was mostly dresses and frilly tops,

“are you shopping for yourself or…”

Arianna stopped her search, looking from Dani to the clothes, “you don’t like dresses?”

“I don’t like *pink,*” Dani replied gingerly.

All those laces and little bows made her wanna run. She had never understood why some girls could stand that crap. Didn’t the skirt get in the way? Didn’t they feel suffocated by all that pink strings and flowerprinted bows?

Dani could already fell the scratching and itching from the tights and suffocation of the small shiny shoes. How was people supposed to run and move in those things?

Arianna gave her a look over, “sorry, I thought you were just wearing something Danny had lend you…guess I just jumped to conclusions.”

She returned the clothes to one of the shops assistants with a apological smile and led the raven-haired girl out on the street again, “so do you like boy clothing or just less feminine style? How about tight black skits? Jeans?”

“I don’t know,” Dani said unsure, looking around for inspiration.

Clothes had never been something she had speculated much in. She had just been wearing what she could get her hands on and what she felt comfortable in. Like running, hiding, and keeping her warm.

Vlad had tried pulling a dress over her head when she was born, but she had instantly hated it by instinct and he had given her some of the clothes he had collected for his clone son. The shorts had been two sizes too big, but she had managed with a belt and sweatshirt.

But having a style? She guessed her ghost outfit was her ideal style…

“Could we find something like this?”

She led the other into one of the smaller alleys, away from prying eye and transformed. Arianna clasped her hands together with shining eyes, “I know exactly what you need – come on!”

Arianna dragged her into the nearest teen shop and searched eagerly through the outerwear section.

She returned with something white in her arms and pushed the smaller halfa into the changing room, before closing the door, “close your eyes and transform.”

Dani rolled her eyes, but closed them anyway and turned to her ghost form. She felt something cool and smooth fit around her back and arms. A heavy shirt maybe?

“A very reliable source of mine and young halfa, once said that all great ghosts wears a cape or something like that. This isn’t exactly a cape, but I think it fits – what do you think?”

Dani opened her eyes and blinked confused. She was in her normal ghost outfit. A stretchable material that had grown with her and turned from baggy, to curving her legs and torso slightly with the white boots.

The white material had been a short waist jacket.

The white leatherjacket fit her upper half closely and made her breast and hips seem more prominent, more grown up. It fit her black and white outfit perfectly and added a more mature and tough touch to her style.

Dani realized just how much she had grown; she wasn’t a child anymore.

“Arianna…did you ever forgive your mother?”

Arianna adjusted the jacket in the mirror with a cheery smile, “nope. I’m too much of a bitch to stop holding grudges.”

Dani giggled, “well that makes two of us, I guess.”

Arianna let her transform back to human and pointed behind her with a thumb, “want to find a McDonalds and gossip about that hot huntress of yours?”

Dani nodded with matching grin. She had a good feeling about this.

Chapter 17

Vlad Masters was counting the minutes calmly, but restless.

Yesterday's fight hadn't been the first and the man knew by instinct that it wouldn't be the last either. Arianna had interests that were going contrary his own and with her new gained freedom she crossed it to the absolute limits.

It both captivated and irritated him cruelly.

He couldn't wait to bring her back to Wisconsin and get back to normal. And then again…

He had regarded her sleeping form when he woke up before the alarm clock. All her features smoothed out and so vulnerable that she seemed younger somehow. It had reminded him of the time she had been in a coma. Left to his mercy and will.

I so many ways she still was. But so was he, he knew that now.

It still surprised him every morning to find someone else lying beside him and he had wrapped her with his body in order to convince himself that this was real. His reality.

His little burgeoning family.

He had waited for her and Dani's return with a readymade list of all the means and arguments he could use to break her down, force her to subdue to him and understand her place.

She was his wife and future mother of his heirs, she wasn't his prisoner or slave, she was her own, but above all his. Defying him was something that wouldn't go unpunished.

He had only let himself persuaded into this public wedding and reunion with her family and former home, because the contract allowed him to give her such privileges. The unpleasant media storm and her angry family hadn't been part of his original plan, but the general plan stood still.

The contract had bound them together forever and she was his, body and soul, as he was hers. He would never regret signing that contract, neither would he ever regret choosing her as his woman.

He had already known from the start that love between them would be difficult, perhaps even impossible.

He had, after all, arranged this marriage between them without her consent or permission and robbed her of all rights when he made it clear he wanted her out of the need for children rather than infatuation.

Anger and despise of his person was expected as a natural reaction.

Nevertheless, he had expected that she would warm up to him eventually, maybe even get to show mutual readiness towards him. Hoping she would be sensible enough to see the rationality of their union and love the child who would be the fruit of their relationship.

Time could change a person and Vlad had all the time in the world.

Vlad knew the chances of her falling for him eventually was highly a fact. He was a coveted man, desired by many and with his confidence, money and looks, he believed himself fully able to seduce this small hybrid woman and win her over.

They were after all not so different from one another, they were both outsiders in their flock and was born manipulators, who could control their environment as oiled tangents to their will.

They were survivors in this cruel worlds and survivors sought one another out as a law of nature.

If she wouldn't fall for him eventually, she would come to see the benefits of him if necessary. The woman wasn't stupid or a simple gold-digger, but her best chances of a peaceful life would be at his side.

Vlad knew it was only a matter of time. Maybe that was the reason last night had surprised him as it had. He hadn't seen it coming.

She had sighed heavenly when she had returned from the shopping

trip and found him in the lounge, legs crossed and hands folded, waiting with an unreadable face in the main chair.

“Don’t look at me like that, Vlad. This isn’t even about Dani, is it?”

He had let her explain herself without a word, let her come up with all the little quaint arguments she could wrap herself in and justify her actions with. Let her simmer in her own desperate attempt to maintain control and equality between them.

He waited patiently. He would tamper her down in time, break her down with flawless wordplay and lure her into doubt and back to submission. Back to him.

All his ulterior motives and well-composed sentences, however, fell apart when she had looked at him and suddenly smiled tiredly. Seemed so lost and exposed as she stood in front of him. Giving him a look he had never though he should gain from the little enigma that was his wife.

”I can’t help it, Vlad…I love you.”

Vlad had felt as if someone had slapped him. Not the painful burning sensation that came after a strike, but the distinct awakening and clear orientation that followed.

He had searched her eyes. Couldn’t stand the thought of being derived or lied to. He had been tricked before by so many others he had trusted and loved. He couldn’t bare it anymore. Wouldn’t.

But nothing chances in her expression, no signs of ulterior motives or slip in her voice. She stood in front of him exactly as she was. Raw and open, finally out of her polite and cold protection, the armor that was her demeanor.

Her words were born of emotion and her eyes clear and resignedly. She was his.

He had stood up, all previously preparations of changing her forgotten. Retain his dominant position in room and intimidating her with simple visual tricks to break her down to his liking. All dismissed.

She had said she loved him. The three words he had waited, but never dared to hope for. From her of all people.

He wasn't ashamed that they had ended up at their bedroom or had slept long past noon, neglected their guests and responsibilities. As she had been lying there beside him, sleeping and serene, he had felt a triumph greater than anything else.

Happiness even.

He had won something genuine, something that could not be won by force or money. He had achieved one of his most burning wishes. Love. A family.

Soon he would have them all.

It was obvious that the young Danielle was about to undergo the same transformation as her male counterpart. Vlad had seen it in the way the young girl had looked up at his wife after their return to the hotel.

Danielle would soon consider Arianna as her mother and seek the same attachment to her as Daniel before her. Vlad had possessed her love once and he knew she would eventually trust him again.

With Arianna at his side, he would take care of the girl and give her the seat at his table and home that rightfully should have been hers.

Danielle was his and he would make things right.

A foolish smile had been patch over his face all day, he could tell even without a mirror and for the first time in a long time, Vlad was completely indifferent to what others thought of him.

The dear Daniel had been staring at him when the hotel guests had meet at brunch, when he thought Vlad wasn't aware. Vlad had chuckled to himself by the sight of the boy's evident confusion and suspicion.

All in good time, my boy, he thought quietly and kissed Arianna's temple at the table.

The boy would soon be a part of his little paradise.

-

Danny didn't get it. He didn't get it!

Dani had told him how she and Arianna had ditched Vlad after a huge verbal fight and misused his credit cards to the plastic core. Left him to simmer all day. She even called him a fruitloop!

Then why was he walking around like a ray of sunshine, all giddy and grinning like a happy idiot?

Danny hated it, but apparently not as much as Dani. She had made gagging sounds next to the loving pair, forced to sit at their table and being presented to everyone as Vlad and Arianna's resent adopted daughter.

Jack had been out of his mind with joy, while his mother had given Dani a confused look, her mind possible screaming at her that there was something oddly familiar about this girl.

If she had come to the conclusion on her own, that Dani looked alarming much like Danny and even shared his habits and part of his name, she didn't show it.

Danny guessed she probably would push such a thought away immediately, but bite his thumbs anxious still. You never knew with his mother.

Under the silly blue hazmat suit, pretty face and Arkansas accent, there was a scary intelligence and a woman of genius, who shouldn't be underestimated.

Danny had learnt that the hard way and he would always flee the fight, when she met him in his ghost form. Couldn't risk getting restrained on her laboratory table ever again.

"Wow she sure looks a lot like Danny. Gotta love your taste in children, Vladdy," Jack exclaimed enthusiastic. Danny facepalmed, while Vlad choked and Arianna spit her coffee laughing loudly.

That seemed to be her newly required reaction to all Jack's comments these days.

Danny couldn't blame her.

"Jack, pumpkin, turn the sentence over in your head before speaking," Maddie corrected him with a smile and turned to Dani, asking her about her interests and hobbies.

Arianna's father looked concerned at his daughter and turned to Vlad with a frown, "you sure its right to adopted like that? I am not sure it healthy for my daughter to both manage a wedding and a teenage daughter, after what she has been though."

Arianna said something in their own strangely vowel and muddy unaccented language, which made him smile, but he still seemed worried.

"I'm impressed, V-man," Jack continued, patting the other so hard Vlad's forehead almost smashed the table, "you're getting tied to a beautiful woman and already got a kid in high school! You got the whole package and catching up with me and Madds here."

Jack grinned widely, "we'll finally get to have couple dates and have our kids mingle – hey! Why not let sweet Dani here go with the other to that park Jazz mentioned earlier?"

"It's not a park, dad," Jazz corrected didactically, "it's a historical national them park. It has one of the world's oldest rollercoasters and it's still in order."

"You're talking about Tivoli?" Jonathan asked suddenly. He had kept quiet for the most of the time, only talking his own language with his father and occasionally with his sister, "I could take them if it's okay with you?"

"Well," Arianna stated slowly looking from her father to her brother, "I guess me and dad could get the rest of the family at the airport by ourselves then. I hope my driving license hasn't expired."

They all left the hotel an hour later.

Arianna and her father to fetch her family, while Jazz and their parents drove with Vlad to see some historical places and go to the theater – Jazz brought the Fenton peeler along in her purse and promised to watch Vlad like a hawk – while Jonathan assembled the teens and drove for seven minutes to the infamous place called "Tivoli".

Danny was stile annoyed, but felt a childish glee nevertheless, when they reached the gate to the theme park.

A huge gate stood out to the front of the train station and held a long line of eager kids, teens and chatting parents, waiting for their turn to buy tickets and enter.

Behind the gates a loud amount of people could be heard screaming and occasionally one of the cards of the roller-coaster, that towered over the park would pass and increase the volume of happy yells and cries.

"I have to try that one!" Dani exclaimed, pointing at something that looked like a golden pole.

A secured seat of eight people was raised far above them until it reached the top, stopped for 15 seconds and then dropped down, before the machinery caught the seats a meter above the ground.

"Wait a second," Johnathan warned, pulling out his phone, "we have to meet up with my –"

"Jonathan!"

The group turned to the sound of another man and Johnathan brightened up in a huge grin and ran up to a white man with short blond hair and beard. Danny blinked surprised when the two shared a loving kiss and walked back to them hand in hand.

No one commended on it and Jonathan presented him as his boyfriend with a hesitation.

The two men chatted hastily in danish while the others waited their turn in the line and got the access bracelet, that would allow them to try all the rides for the rest of the day.

Dani's shinning eyes and childlike impatience made Danny smile, despite his gloomy thoughts and he realized this very well could be her first visit to an amusement park. Yikes.

He pulled Sam and Valerie aside, "let's make sure Dani gets the best of it, right?"

The two girls followed his gaze to the little giddy halfa and seemed to come to the same conclusion as him. Valerie nodded, "we got it – hey Dani you wanna try that one?"

The little halfa tore her focus to the direction Valerie pointed to and lost her jaw, when she caught sight of the park's wildest ride.

A little plane for four passengers connected to a long robot arm, flung its passengers with 100 km / h up in the air and pressed them back in their seats with 5 g-force. The plane turned around its oven axle in wild 350 degree spins, making one of the passengers' puke as he left the ride.

Dani's icy blue eyes widened with awe and she wasted no time, grabbing Sam's black sleeve and Valerie's hand before dragged them to the line.

The blond man said something, nodding in Dani's direction and Jonathan shrugged. Danny gave them a look and Jonathan grinned sheepish.

"Mike just found it funny she's so impressed by this place," he said and Danny blinked.

"What do you mean?"

"Well," Mike said, taking part of the conversation, "you guys are Americans, right? You have all those extreme theme parks and wild rides back in the states. Most tourist think the Tivoli rides are small or boring in comparison. But she looks like she never seen anything like this. It's just, you know, nice."

"I guess," Danny said, recalling some of the rides he had tried back home. Either on vacations or when the traveling carnival opened in the summer season in Amity.

The rollercoaster back there was twice this size of the one in front of him and he knew he had tried things wilder than the rid his little cousin, friend and girlfriend was in line to.

Tucker shrugged, “hey, I think this place is great in its own way, dude. It’s pretty cozy and green for a theme park, but I guess it’s because it’s a stable park and everything. And it got great Wi-Fi – my PDA is surfing like magic in here.”

Mike eyed the PDA with surprise, “wow, you got the latest model? It’s not coming to Europe before fall – can I hold it?”

The two techno-geeks jumped into a heated conversation and Danny shared a grin with Johnathan, “looks like we are on our own, want to find some coffee?”

“Sure,” Danny said and followed him to one of the little ice-cream shops. Jonathan took his black, while Danny ordered his with cream and sugar.

It surprised him that the man liked his coffee the exact opposite of his sister, who almost turned her coffee into a dessert, but he guessed siblings didn’t have to share everything.

He and Jazz had their similarities and indifferences to and even though Jonathan looked like the taller male version of Arianna, the similarities seemed to end there.

“Listen, Danny,” the guy began, making sure no one was listing in around them, “my sister told me and my father about all this…”

He stopped, seemed to search for the right words, “*ghost stuff* and all that. I didn’t believe her at first, but then she transformed and things got serious. I have the feeling she haven’t told us everything, but she told me about you, what you did and I just wanted to thank you. For saving my sisters life and bring her home.”

Danny blinked surprised.

“Oh, hey no problem,” he said a little embarrassed. He hadn’t seen that coming, but he hadn’t really talked with the guy either, so maybe he should have expected it.

“No, really, I can’t thank you enough. If it hadn’t been for you, I would still have considered her dead, I…” the guy seemed lost at words, “we lost hope, you know. All of us. My father was the last to stop searching for her, he used up his pension just travelling and talk to help organization, private investigators and help centers, all of them. He kept trying, while I just…I just gave up. I went to the university because I had this stupid idea that I had to follow in her footsteps and live her life, but I couldn’t manage it, I just felt like shit. If I haven’t meet Mike, I would probably end up doing something crazy. He helped me through, but you just never get over it, not for real. I just gave up on her. Told myself to forget and get over it, I feel like a traitor now…”

He made a pained grimace. Danny pattered his shoulder.

“Hey, it’s okay, Jonathan. It’s not your fault or something like that – and even if you had tried it would have been to no use. None of you even knew the Ghost Zone existed and travelling there would have been impossible,” he consoled, tried to lift the other mood and maybe get some sense through to him.

In some ways, Danny could understand this guy. Danny had stood in the shadow of his own high educated sister and if he had lost Jazz, he would probably destroy himself or worse, done something stupid and get himself killed.

Jazz wouldn’t have wanted that for him and Danny was certain Arianna wouldn’t have wanted that for her little brother either.

“And I’m pretty sure Arianna would understand – and the important thing is that she’s home, right?”

“Right,” the man repeated, almost as to convince himself, “you’re right.”

The both jumped as Tucker and Mike joined the table with huge grins, “hey, Mike just told me about this sweet store down town, that sell PDA part and we wanted to hear if you wanted stay with the girls?”

“Sure,” Danny retorted, not much for geek stores. Jonathan seemed

to be of the same opinion and kissed his boyfriend goodbye. Tucker suddenly sniffed the air like a bloodhound.

"Hey candyfloss!" Tucker sidetracked and got distracted by the sweet smell of puffed sugar and his girlfriend holding them.

Dora smiled widely and lifted the sugar treats, "Tucker look! Colored sugar wool!"

Mike and Tucker joined Dora before walking to the parks exit, loudly discussing modern technology. Jonathan leaned over to Danny with a whisper, "is she a…?"

"Yeah, she's a ghost," Danny finished for him, watching the guy's scared gaze with a grin, "but she's one of my ghost allied, so she won't bite…well unless she turns into a ghost dragon, then she will."

"Sorry," Johnathan said and sighed, "I keep forgetting you're a ghost to, or half-ghost or whatever – she told me you're kind of a superhero back home. Sounds serious."

Danny felt his cheek blush, "I'm not really a hero, I'm not more hero than Vlad is a supervillain."

"You two don't get along?" the man asked slowly and by seeing Danny nod, he smiled in relief, "oh, good, then me and my dad isn't the only ones – I can't stand that guy!"

Danny grinned, but the other turned severe, "no really. I'm more than happy she's back and safe, but did she really have to fall for that jerk? That asshole waited to reveal that he could understand perfectly Danish, till *after* me and my father had made a fool of ourselves and talked behind his back in front of him. I can't stand him, he's so smock and self-absorbed, calling me 'boy' and sending my dad those smirks, when he holds her – throwing around with his money and pay the Danish press to back off and shows of like he owns everything he sees. He such a fucking smartass bastard. What the hell does she see in him?"

Danny had no idea, but didn't feel like telling this guy the deeper details about how the two meet and decided to become an item.

It really wasn't Danny's right to tell and he was pretty sure the guy would try and kill Vlad if he got the entire tale about the whole kidnapping case and demon contract.

Danny wasn't sure if Vlad would spare the guy, even if he was the brother of his wife and brother-in-law. The fruitloop was unpredictable and fully capable of making a guy like Jonathan disappear from the surface of the earth without a single regret.

"It's a mystery, dude."

Johnathan sighed, taking a tired sip of his coffee.

"I should probably thank you for taking the job as the best man to, now I'm at it," he said and suddenly grinned, "so what have you planned? Strippers?"

Danny was taken aback, "what!?"

"The bachelor party," the guy explained, "I don't know how you do in the states, but back here, it's the best man who plans the groom's last day as a free man. Usual with strippers and a lot of beer."

Danny had the feeling he looked like a rabbit caught in car light, "uhhmmm, I have no idea – when I'm I suppose to host this party again?"

"Tomorrow, it's the day before the wedding – seriously, you got nothing?"

Danny hid his face in his hands, "fuck, I promised your sister I would do this for her sake. If I don't come up with something, I'm letting her down and Vlad will…well I have no idea what Vlad will do – make fun of my maybe. What do you do at a Bachelor party again?"

Johnathan gave him a grave look, "you need help, maybe you should talk with your father, he's Vlad's friend, right? But if it was me, I would probably do the stripper thing. Maybe try and humiliate the man, getting something nice blackmail material on the jerk."

Danny suddenly saw the light at the end of the tunnel. The teen grinned cunning, "hey, Johnathan? Do you wanna plan a humiliating

party, Vlad's never going to forget or be able to retell to his wife?"

Johnathan smiled wide and looked alarming a lot like Nightshade a second before she would strike a weaker opponent, "you got a deal, superhero."

Chapter 18

“You sure this is a good idea?”

Sam watched him get ready from her lazy spot on the bed. If Danny didn’t had a revenge slash bachelor party to maintain, he would have stayed and jumped right back into bed with her, but it had to wait.

“Don’t worry, me and Johnathan have planned this and I got him on dial if something happens,” he retorted and packed the last of his stuff in his bag, “it’s not like I actually need that much help anyway – my dad is probably gonna make this painful for that pompous jerk in the end by himself. It’s gonna be fun.”

“If you say so,” Sam sighed and rose from the tangled sheets, getting dressed herself, “I have never been to a bachelorette party before and I’m pretty sure I’ve never attended one planned by three crazy ghosts either.”

Danny gave her a humored look. Just like he was forced to attend the grooms last day as official single, Sam would be dragged to the bride’s party.

Danny suspected that there would be male strippers, but wouldn’t pose as the jealous boyfriend and told himself that it wouldn’t matter. She probably knew there would be strippers for his part and she hadn’t said a thing.

Danny considered himself lucky and finished up with an optimistic tone, “alright, but if something goes wrong we can call Tucker – he promised to be the man in the field and act as back up in case one of us needs assistance – you got your ecto-gun?”

“Why would I need a ecto-gun?” she retorted incredulous, “it’s a girls’ night out with Arianna, Dani, Valerie, your mom and your female ghost enemies, not a…okay you right, I’m gonna take two.”

“Take the Fenton wrist rays, now you’re at it.”

They both finished their armament, Sam placed her weapons under

her cloths and Danny stored it with his ghost form, before walking out the suite and started to part at the hallway to each party.

Danny dragged her in the last second and kissed her playfully. Sam giggled and lock her arms around his neck while smiling into the kiss. She bit his lower lip and smiled with lidded eyes up at him, “see you at the wedding, hotshot.”

Danny grinned and let her go, “good luck with the girls night out!”

“You need it more than me,” she yelled back and disappeared behind the next corner. Danny walked the last stretch to Vlad suite and wasn’t late to acknowledge the pun, when he saw Vlad had taken the hotels Master suite.

“Guess he calls his bedroom at home the Master-Masters bedroom to,” Danny mumbled and rolled his eyes, expected to hear his father’s booming voice on the other side of the door, but instead caught Vlad’s more secretive voice seeping though.

Danny frowned. His father had asked him to catch up with him and Vlad after brunch, in order to start the bachelor party in town, but Vlad’s low tone and conservative hum, was far from any conversation Danny had ever heard between these two men.

This wasn’t a conversation between a sarcastic and ecstatic person – Vlad was giving someone orders. Danny fumed and leaned closer to get the words on the other side of the door. If Vlad was giving orders, it was because of a scheme.

“…follow them closely and search the place, I don’t want anyone to interfere with the plans for tomorrow. The last thing I need is those idiots to ruining everything.”

Vlad sounded angry and Danny smirked at that, but didn’t lose touch with the greater picture. Who was Vlad referring to and what kind of plans was he plotting for tomorrow? Danny didn’t like this.

If had Vlad planed something to happen during the wedding – and if he had, what would that mean for Danny and the others?

Danny got so caught up in his own speculations, that he almost lost

the rest of the conversation, gasping silently as his ghost sense activated and he felt a ghost leave the building.

"…Runner still wants his fighter back and the Cube is willing to compromise if I hand them over and pay according to their demands. If I don't, then all those blasted bounty hunters will."

Danny's blood froze and he forgot to breath. Vlad was gonna hand them all over to the Cube…

"I knew it! You never loved her!" Danny cried angry and blasted the door in. Vlad stared at him rather awkward, giving the smoking door over by the couch a long gaze.

"Giving your rather upset behavior, my guess is that you must have jump to silly conclusions, Daniel," Vlad stated with a cold voice and stepped up to the angry teen without any acknowledge of Danny's battle stand and flaring hands.

Danny ignored the man's disappointed frown and gritted his teeth, "silly conclusions? Is you selling us all to those slave traders a silly conclusion!? I should have known from the start that all this was just a fake commitment – you played everyone with some fake contract and lovey-dovey smile," Danny yelled furious and turned completely ghost, "and what about Dani! Huh? You were gonna sell her to? How can you live with yourself, your selfish monster!"

Danny made ready to blast the man, ghost form or not, when the loose door tipped and a groaning man stood up from behind it. His suit ragged and face scratched.

Danny lost his anger and hung in the air unknowing what to do. Damn it, had he just hurt one of the hotels staff?

"Uhhh, sorry man, I can explain by the way!"

Vlad gave him a look, "can you now?"

Danny realized he still hung in the air like a ghost and his hands was smoking, clearly not very human or explainable either.

"I'm the…hotel's handy man? Fixing doors and stuff…levitating,

pretty normal for us Danish workers I've heard."

The man kicked the broken door of him with a sneer and got the dust out of his toxic green hair and the outfit that surprisingly turned out to be a tanktop and military pants. Complete with heavy boots.

Wait…green hair? Matching goatee, soldier getup and a body built like a boxer? No way.

"Looks like my prey have only turned more foolish, since I let him roam free," the big man replied in a smooth gravelled voice. Giving Danny a cruel grin with teeth like grey tombstones.

Danny stared and deadpanned, "…Skulker?"

"Like the camouflage, Whelp?" the glamoured hunter grinned devilishly, smile too wide to be human, but human looking nonetheless.

Danny shrugged, "actually, yes – It's pretty impressive."

The hunter seemed happy with his prey's approval and Danny turned back to his nemesis, "let me guess, you were gonna make Skulker neutralize Arianna and Dani, while you were gonna knock me out yourself – nice plan, but it's not gonna work!"

Skulker lighted up like a child on Christmas eve, "really, I get to hunt the two kittens now?"

"NO!" Vlad yelled angered and turned into his ghost alter ego, before yanking Danny down to eyelevel by the neck, "I will not allow any of you to ruin my wedding or upsetting my wife, with your foolishness or crazy theories!"

"It's not crazy, if it's true," Danny pointed out, while struggling to get free. Skulker pulled out his glowing blade with shining green eyes, "fine, I can't settle with the Whelp then."

"Skulker I've already told you –!"

"Show me what you got, terminator!"

“You guys aren’t fighting, right? Mom’s not gonna like it.”

Danny, Skulker and Vlad all froze at once to the sound of Dani’s voice. Skulker had his blade lifted to strike for Danny’s head, while Vlad was balancing on one foot, keeping them apart, while Danny was gnawing at Vlad’s arm and aiming to kick his face.

They all shared a short gaze, before jumping apart, putting up fake smiles and hiding flaring hands and blades behind their backs.

“Who, us? Never, sweetheart,” Vlad defended grandly and turned human in time for the sound of stilettos to reach the master suite. Danny followed his example just in time.

Arianna walked in with a smile, but frowned when she noticed the broken door, “you guys’ aren’t fighting, *right?”*

She gave the teen a stern look, “well?”

“No,” Danny said with fake happiness, matching the other men’s strained grins, “we’re just…you know, doing men stuff, like wrestling a bit and punching walls, and hey, what did you know? These hotel doors can’t take a ecto-blast without breaking, heh…yeah.”

She didn’t seem to buy it and showed him with three fingers that she was watching him and Skulker, “behave, okay?”

“Yes, ma’am,” they responded and Vlad took her in his arms, “one night before the wedding, how are you and our daughter doing so far, love?”

Arianna broke into a smile and pulled Dani in for a hug, “she’s lovely Vlad – she just like Danny, but a girl…with a weird boyish taste in clothes and disgusting junk food. She’s perfect.”

“I’m right here,” Dani reminded them, but the couple was already kissing.

Jack Fenton chose to make his entry, “so is the bachelor party! The Fenton RV is packed and ready to follow the best man’s plan of the evening – I even brought my ghost Finder, in case the city should contain any ghost for us to hunt!”

The man grinned, but turned sober when the gadget spoke.

“Ghost ahead.”

Arianna, Dani, Vlad, Danny and Skulker returned his gaze. Not a single ghost or halfa moved an inch.

“Ghost ahead – you really need to get your eyes checked, if you can’t spot them, they like, right in front of you,” the machine’s dull female voice continued and Jack gave it a violent shake.

“Must be broken – again!”

Everyone breathed in relief, even Skulker, who eyed the machine with interest. A little too much interest for Danny’s likening.

“Never mind,” Jack continued and yanked Vlad to his side, out of his wife’s arms, “I can’t tell you how long I’ve been waiting to do this, V-man. I’ve so many plans and things we can do! It’s gonna be college all over again!”

Vlad visible cringed and Skulker looked like one big question mark, “what’s a Bachelor party?”

Vlad scowled, “a silly wedding tradition, where the groom’s male companions humiliate and corrupts him the night before the wedding, to celebrate his 'last day as a single' and possible scare him of the thought of marriage.”

Vlad clearly had no higher thought of the tradition, but the hunter nodded deep in thought, “a test of manhood to prove one’s skills of endurance and honor, before tying down a mate.”

The disguised ghost slammed his fist down to his palm, “an honorable quest – I will assist you on this, Plasmius and honor this human tradition.”

Vlad rolled his eyes at Jack confused look, “he’s a foreigner, don’t take his talk to serious – Jack, this is my employee, Benjamin. Benjamin this is Jack.”

Skulker send both Dani and Danny a dark look as they had to restrain

themselves by all force not to laugh.

"Benjamin?" Dani snickered and muffled her grin with both hands, "didn't know you were a butler in your spare time – care to hunt the sugar bowl for me?"

"There you are!" Maddie exclaimed cordially and grabbed both Arianna and Dani by the collars, "the girls are packed and the blindfolds for the bride and daughter is ready to go!"

"The what?" both female halfas asked confused and was dragged out the door.

Jack waved after them, "get them back to the alter in one piece, honey! And watch out for ghosts and bride-snatchers!"

Maddie waved with the Fenton Anti-Creep stick, "got it covered!"

"Man, that's hot," his father whispered and both Vlad and Danny facepalmed.

"I can't believe I'm allowing this," Vlad groaned and shrieked when Jack pulled a bag over his head.

"And I can't believe I almost forgot the blindfold! To the Fenton RV!"

Danny and Skulker ran after his father carrying the yelling Vlad, struggling to get free. He was sensible enough not to use his ghost powers and reveling himself to Jack and was thrown head first into the ghost RV. Danny could fell this was gonna be fun.

He snapped a picture and send it to both Tucker and Jonathan with a smirk.

Tucker replied with the word, *GOLD*.

Jack jumped into the RV with Skulker and Danny on his trail and the girls waved from the open car, where Arianna was blindfolded on the front seat. She waved blindly with a cheery voice, "bye, love! See you at the alter! I bring a stripper!"

Vlad struggled against his college bodies hold and got the bag of his

head, “over my dead body! I forbid it, you hear me!?”

“Relax, Vlad,” Maddie sing-song and straightened her goggles with a vicious smile, “it’s just a bachelorette party, it’s not gonna be anything unusual. It’s just gonna be like in *college.*”

Vlad paled two shades, “no!”

The female laughed cruelly, clearly not forgiven him for flirting with her, while Arianna had been prisoner and drove off with smoking wheels. Vlad yelled after them, but didn’t get far as Jack pressed a new bag down his head and locked the car.

“Just like in college,” he whispered melancholic and took the steering wheel. Skulker took the front seat and Danny jumped in the back with Vlad. The man yanked the bag of his head with a murderous look, face flustered and ponytail a mess.

Danny snapped another picture for the memories and smirked. That fell fast, when the pissed off man whispered furious down into his own phone, “follow them and bring me an update every hour, that’s an order!”

Danny snatched it, knowing he was playing with fire, but he had to know who Vlad had hired to kidnap Dani and Arianna. Vlad grabbed him by the neck, clear murder in his eyes.

“Nice thinking, son!” Jack exclaimed, grabbing the phone and Danny’s as well now he was at it.

He locked it all into a secure box in front and locked it with his fingerprint scanner. He returned to the road just in time to dodge an oncoming car, “this is gonna be a man-trip only – no contact with the female part of our life what so ever, hah!”

“Got it,” Skulker informed with serious determination and flung his own communication gear out the window to Vlad’s horror, “a complete man dominated quest for honor! Bring it on, burly human-man!”

Skulker and Jack howled like animals, having a blast, while Vlad was sending Danny sincerely death treats with his eyes, “you going to

regret this, Daniel. Trust. My. *Word*."

Danny couldn't really take him serious in this state and smirked," then trust this, Fruitloop. Tell me what you planned and I cancel the more painful parts of the trip. I'm pretty sure you gonna regret it if you don't."

Vlad gathered his eyes to narrow slits, eyes glowing red, "you're playing with fire, boy. I have no reason to take you in on my personal business and believe me, there is worse thing than having to endure you and your father's foolish pranks."

Danny snorted, "yeah, like your wife. What do you think she gonna say, when I tell her, you let a stripper give you a lap dance?"

Vlad rolled his eyes, "like she ever takes your simple word for it."

"She'll take it if I have Tucker cook up a snapshot with Photoshop, it's not that hard – not like paying a real stripper to actually touch you. Ew. I can't carry the weight of a traumatized stripper on my shoulders and where would I even find the money to pay such a high price?"

Danny felt a little pinch of pride and patted himself mentally. Using Arianna against Vlad was the best idea he had gotten in a long time. It was practical perfect for the teen. Arianna would probably believe anything he said and the best part about it?

Vlad was aware.

It would be just like the time he had weather powers – just better and more sustained.

Vlad gave him an incredulous look, eyes glowing in rage "you little…" and suddenly stopped.

Danny feared for a moment that he had snapped something important inside the Fruitloop's mind. The man suddenly relaxed, the angry look switching to a lot softer and pleased expression.

Voice almost questioning, "you're blackmailing me for information."

Danny blinked. The situation not unfolding as he had just thought a second ago, it felt like Vlad had just robbed him of something and he scowled, “duh? What does it look like?”

“Using my loved ones against me and forcing me to endure your cruelty…well done, Badger,” Vlad replied impressed, “well done.”

Danny scoffed, “shut up, this isn’t some game, Plasmius.”

“Oh, but it is,” Vlad retorted with a voice full of dark promises.

Danny felt something in the air change, something would seem that the power and control the teen had held just a second ago, had tipped over the scale and ended up on Vlad’s side.

Vlad looked down on him with that look in those midnight blue eyes Danny knew all too well and feared more than anything.

Vlad had plans for him.

“You want to play with fire, my boy, then let’s play – If you win, I tell you what really was discussed at the hotel room, before you so dramatically barged in. I will tell you the things I know and everything to it.”

Danny knew it was suicide (or at least dangerous with a chance of great amount of pain), playing along the older halfa’s games, but he had to get to the bottom of this.

If Danny and Arianna was in danger and Danny had the slightest chance of preventing it, he had to try.

And since Vlad so kindly offered it like that…“alright, what’s the catch, fruitloop?”

Vlad smirked like the cat that just ate the canary.

“Convince me,” he simply said, “show me just how much you want to know and how far you’re willing to go to gain what you want. Drop all of those silly heroic morals of yours and force me. Show me just how ruthless you can be, boy.”

Danny gritted his teeth. He was really playing with fire. Normally he wouldn't have a problem with fighting Vlad or beating the man to get his schemes out of him, but this was not just everyday fighting his nemesis.

Vlad wanted him to be cruel and become something Danny had sworn never to get to the bottom of. Being like Vlad.

Becoming Dan.

"On one condition."

Vlad lifted an eyebrow and Danny returned his stubborn look, "tell me how you talked to over the phone."

Vlad snorted, "I suppose a little taste of what's to come is in order. I had The fright Knight on the phone. I told him back at the hotel to look for my wife and daughter while I was away."

Danny didn't trust him, but it made sense and the ghost signature he had felt leaving the hotel back then had indeed been a dark fire core, "how do I know you telling the truth?"

Danny already knew the answer before the stupid words had left his lips and Vlad grinned with fanged glee, "you don't. You will have to *force* it out of me."

Danny could already tell by the others dark chuckled, that this was gonna be a long day.

Chapter 19

“And I didn’t get the pony, still wanted the pony – my father only saw meat in them and we survived on that along with ranch dressing, melted cheese, and fudge. Lots of fudge, the war was a lawless wasteland for a young pony-loving boy, I tell you,” Jack Fenton assured and frowned with a haunted expression, “the war…”

Skulker listened with the intensity of a sect disciple, eating Jack’s word up, while Danny and Vlad tried tuning him out with each luck for himself on the backseat.

Vlad dragged a hand down his sweaty face, “I still have no idea what war he’s talking about…”

Danny felt kind of sweaty to in the humid car, but knew better than to touch any buttons in the ghost RV and even Vlad seemed to have realized the alarming fact that he was caged inside a ghost deathtrap, eyeing the buttons and car interiors suspiciously.

Someone seemed to have forgotten to give Skulker that memo and the hunter tried out some of the car’s instruments switches. The car bounced violently when the laser on top shot and the jet engines activated.

“Slow down, soldier!” Jack ordered, more amused that angered and got the car under control while continuing his dangerous driving, “this baby is no joke on the civil roads. It’s made for ghost hunting, not speed race – have I ever told you about our ghost hunting business?”

“Pretty sure we’ve just meet, human man,” Skulker informed and Jack lighted up.

“Then I can’t wait to rant!”

Danny groaned and threw himself back into the backseats.

If there was something worse than being trapped in the warm Fenton RV and listened to his father’s rant, it was being trapped inside the

warm Fenton RV, with your father, two of your ghost enemies and listen to your father's rant – from the very beginning!

Skulker nodded intensely to the man's achievements, "impressive. Personal I like to hunt my ghost prey down for the sake of the hunt and the trophy off course – but torturing your prey seems like a likewise profitable practice. I like your style, human."

"And I like your green hair," Jack replied grinning, "reminds me of the time me and V-man here, was in our garage-band in college. Remember *the Skunk Punks*, Vlad?"

"No," the man replied simply.

"Sure you do – the garage-band only lasted a semester but we had the time of our life. I was the lead singer, while V-man was the lead-guitar," Jack said and suddenly frowned, "never got a drummer, but it worked out with a banjo and Harriet Chin on her Tanggu drum. We even named a song after her; *Harry Chin hits the stick* – get it? Harry chin? Ha! Wish we had found a real drummer though – you play anything?"

Skulker scratched his electric green hair, "I've played the drums when my girlfriend brought me on one her tours."

Danny leaned up to his father, "It's that female singer that drove all the teens crazy three years back and you hated so much."

Jack searched his mind, "nope don't recall – but I guess it's settled the – Ben, my man, you will be the lead drummer in *the Skunk Punks Vol. 2* as soon we get it up running again!"

"That's out of question," Vlad informed coldly and cringed when Jack let go of the wheel to hug him, ignoring the man's breathing problems.

"You're right, Vladdy! Not unless we overcome our status as tied down middle-aged men and find our teen spirit again. I knew I could count on you, V-man!"

A honk of a truck made Danny jump forward and grab the wheel. He realized along with Skulker and Vlad, that dodging the truck was out

of question and turned the car intangible instead.

The truck drove through them and Jack blinked confused when the car had been dark for a second, “other than me that just felt like they passed through a beer truck?”

They all shook their heads in unison and Jack took the wheel with a puzzled expression, “must be the teen spirit getting to me. Haven’t hallucinated about that much beer since the Institute contest of the Wisconsin college. That was right after the mouth-wash incident.”

“We don’t talk about that!” Vlad sneered and Jack nodded seriously.

“What happened in the College Pub, stays in the College Pub. I got your back, V-man!”

The RV came to a slowdown and parked at the first destination of the Bachelor party. Vlad lifted an unimpressed eyebrow.

“A paintball field? How original of you, Daniel,” he drawled laconic.

Danny ignored the groom’s opinion of his choice of activity and found a little gadget in his pocked as the others stood out of the car. He grinned as he sneaked up on the older halfa’s back, while Vlad was inspecting the map of the park’s battlefields.

“Not as original as this,” Danny said sweetly and pressed the Fenton-ghost-drainer to Vlad’s spine.

Vlad yelled in shock and pain. The ponytail he had pulled back to its neat normalcy in the car, now ruined again and smoking slightly.

His eye twitched, “did you just use the Plasmius-Maximus against me!?”

“Nooo,” Danny grinned, twilling the little teaser around his trigger finger, “this is the Fenton-ghost-drainer – notice the ‘Fenton’ in the name? But it’s kind of the same design and for the same purpose. My dad may have designed it, after someone might have given him the idea to one and might stole the blueprint from a certain someone’s lab, but I’m getting ahead of myself.”

He grinned smugly and turned intangible when Vlad tried choking him and fell through him.

Danny leaned down to the spot the man had fallen, “I guess it’s only fair, since you used to steal all my dad’s inventions and place your own name on them – how does it fell, V-man?”

Vlad stood up, a mix of crystal clear wrath and rage painted down into every pore of his form, but it took Danny a second to realize that something else rested beneath the anger. Something he only saw rarely on the older halfas face.

Fear.

“You have no idea what you done, boy…”

Despite knowing that he was above the other in power and strength, Danny took a frightful steep back as Vlad walk towards him. Even without his powers, Vlad seemed to take all the space in the parking lot, cornering Danny like a dangerously predator.

The spell was broken, when Jack gripped the man by the shoulder and made hast to the park’s entrance, “the last to get his armor, will go in naked!”

Danny stood alone at the lot, waiting a second to get his heart to slowly decelerated. What had just happened? The teen knew very well what had happened, but what had just really happened?

All he had done was taken the other’s ghost power for an hour or two, that wasn’t something new and the heaven could stand witness that Danny had been sapped more than once by Vlad, that’s for sure.

Vlad getting pissed off wasn’t anything new either, but who wouldn’t be if they just lost their power in a fight? Danny knew he would get pissed. But that didn’t explain why the had suddenly looked as if he was ready to choke Danny, Jack watching or not.

If Vlad had ever intended to kill the teen and crush him for good, the moment had clearly been today.

Danny shook his head and followed the other’s path into the park

center.

You have no idea what you done, boy…

He was beginning to give the Fruitloop right. He really had no idea what he was getting into, but hell if he didn't get to the bottom of it!

-

"Skulker doesn't get it! What is the point of weapons, if they don't kill the target!?"

Danny facepalmed for the third time, as the Ghost Zone's greatest hunter shook his paintball gear, trying to get the nonexistent missiles to pop out of it, "why make amour without rocket launchers!?"

"It's just for *fun*," Danny stated for the third time and placed his own helmet on his head, opening the visor, "we're just gonna shoot each other for fun, not to kill – never heard of 'catch and release'? It's kind of like 'shot and shot again', but on a safety distance and with a safety word with safe weapons."

"Skulker prefer 'catch and kill'! And 'kill and skin and place pelt on the foot of my bed'!"

The teen gave up on the fuming ghost and went to the bench where his father was tying his boots and laughing at something possible sugarcoated cruel and sarcastic the billionaire had said. How his father could be so blind, never manage to stop baffling Danny.

Even though he didn't know what his friends meant by it, he must have inherited his cluelessness from his dad. Hurray.

"Ready to see your old man in action?" his dad asked, excitement dripping from his huge armor plates and XL-paintball gear. Compared to the lither and slender halfa, his father looked quite like the human tank.

The look would have been complete, if it hadn't been for the orange jumpsuit that peaked up under his black collar.

"You gonna scare the ghost right out of them, dad."

“Yes,” his father grinned self-assured, “that other team haven’t got a spoke of a chance against this dream team. You, me, V-man here and our newest band member, Ben the hunter-guy.”

Danny expected Vlad to come up with some mean comment, but the other was silent and putting his paint-ball gear on with a distant, but determent gaze into nothing in particular.

Danny frowned and asked himself for the third time if he should stay true to the first plane and do all in his power to humiliate Vlad for his and the others amusement, or go along the man’s challenge and find out what dark planes he had in store for them tomorrow.

The whole bachelor-party project seemed silly and insignificantly now, compared to the fact that a death tread could loom over them all.

Danny decided to comply to the other’s challenge and get the information he wanted – but who said he couldn’t do that by humiliate the man as a mean?

“Hey dad,” he whispered, making sure the other halfa wouldn’t notice, “Benjamin is having some problems with his pistol and Vlad is supposed to have fun, so what about you cover Ben, while I cover Vlad?”

His father’s grin told him his little plan had worked and when they waited to get into the field, his father gave him a thumb up.

The paintball leader tapped his clipboard and went through the games rules and security procedure, with surprisingly more enthusiasm that you would have expected from a underpaid man at a play-pretend field for grownups playing war with paintball-guns.

“Okay, so don’t go near and shot them at a close range – follow the safety rules and remember, that the game will end if none of the teams have taken the others base’s flag in a three hours.”

Skulker still looked like it hurt for him to think, “I don’t get it! What do you expect me to do in the meantime in this arena!”

The game leader went through their guns, making sure they were

functional, “well there is points for as many paint-spot you can get on the opposite teams armor and there the whole hunting experience off course.”

Skulker stared at him, suddenly all ears,” you mean…I can hunt everyone in that human arena?”

“Well sure – but mark that sniping isn’t aloud, since people have a habit of breaking their legs, tying to climb tries and stuff.”

The hunter deadpanned, expression turned dark and he smirked maliciously, “oh don’t worry – I like being close to my prey when I strike.”

The leader snorted, clearly not taken the hunter’s word for more than a joke. Danny wasn’t sure what to make of this. He hadn’t really taken Skulker in on the equation when he and Nathan had planned this bachelor-party.

Maybe Paintball wasn’t such a good idea after all.

The only reason Nathan had suggested it in the first place, was because it was popular for a bachelor party and the fact that Vlad once had openly told Danny how much he despised fishing – he was clearly not the outdoor or hunting type.

Forcing him to run around in his human form trying to survive in a paintball field, was to hilarious a vision to pass up. Next to his dad, Vlad would look like a wimp.

Danny wished his dad haven’t taken his phone.

“All right you are all set, have fun!” the game leader cheered and opened the door to the field. Danny ran along with the others and found their base, where a blue flag was waving wittily.

They all kneeled behind the cover and Jack put up a strategy, that only Danny seemed to take notice of. Vlad was still staring into nothing, a frown on his face and Skulker was grinning at something private and looking around with shining green eyes.

His father finished up his plane and Danny guessed he had to take

one for the team and nod in agreement, “hey dad, can I have my phone back?”

“No dice, Danny-boy, the only visual entertainment we’ll be having today, is the sight of defeat from our enemies.”

His father jumped out of the cover and ran with loud battle cries. Danny suddenly looked around, “hey, where did Skulker go?”

Vlad didn’t respond, just staring into the distance, possible thinking of England and completely passive, with a concentrated frown on his face. Danny waved a hand in front of his face, “earth to fruitloop? It’s time to go out there and make a fool of yourself – hallooo!?”

The man grunted, prying the teen of him with a wave, without losing one beat of concentration. Danny lost his patience and pointed his gun at the man, “fine, just tell me what your dark villainous plan is and I won’t make a dent in your head.”

Danny yelped, as the man suddenly snapped out of his trance and pushed Danny hard to the left. A ecto-blast made the base go into flames and Danny stared at the burning flag from his spot on the ground. Vlad dragged him behind a boulder and went back to his concentration.

Danny peaked up behind the boulder and gasped when a mean looking ghost searched the pile of burning tree. Kicking the fallen flag and had three other ghost joining him. Danny recognized their uniform and felt his throat tighten.

That was the guard uniform from the Cube. Those specters were send by the game masters.

Danny turned ghost and made ready to jump out of hiding, when a pink ecto-blast send the three ghost-guards flying. Danny gasped and stared from the scene to the human Vlad beside him.

The owner of the pink shot grinned wicked and the three ghost followed the laughing Plasmius into the air. Danny had a hard time making a working sentence and just pointed from the Plasmius above them, to Vlad beside him.

“Wh…how…what? I hit you with the Fenton-ghost-drainer! You not supposed to get your powers back before three hours!”

Vlad continued his concentrated stare, but gave the teen a smirk, “have it ever occurred to you, that I might have taken it into consideration, that you would use my own invention against me? I have trained, my boy, forced myself to regain my powers outside my body in a power-shorten state. How do you like my duplicate?”

Danny was at a loss of words. Vlad had gone home and hit himself with the Plasmius-Maximus? For *real?* For the sake of training?

He followed the fighting duplicated with his eyes, it looked fully functional and accomplished as any duplicate should be, beating the shit out of those ghosts.

Danny turned back to Vlad, it became clear that Vlad was using all his mind to control the duplicate, making himself vulnerary to an attack, but Danny guessed it was better than being helpless in a forced human form.

He had to admit he was impressed and even a little jealous. The man had actually accomplished to use his power after being stunned. Pretentious jerk.

“Do you really have to be so extra?”

Vlad smirked as the last guard was demolished into a headless corps, colliding into the ashes of their former base, “there’s no shame in being a natural, my boy.”

Danny didn’t change back as the man brought back his duplicate and rose from the hiding spot. Dusted himself off with a laid-back business voice, “now, I believe it would be wise to size that idiot of yours and get Skulker out of here, before the rest of them shows up.”

Danny stopped him by flying in front of him, glowing hands visible, “what are you planning, Vlad? You got exactly five second to talk, before I give you that dent I promised.”

Vlad snorted amused, clearly not taking him for a threat, “I would work on the threatening part, Badger. Make it a little more

convincing, would you?"

Danny felt his eyes glow and Vlad made a mocking gesture of surrender, "oh, the scary eyes, better, but still not very conversing."

Danny duplicated out of sheer anger, surrounding the man, "I don't wanna do this, but if I have to torture you to keep Arianna and Dani safe, I will fill this field with your screams."

A scream of horror teared trough the paintball field, followed by cries of plea and fear. Danny and Vlad both stared into the trees and wooden covers for the source of the sounds.

Both stated running to the next cover. Danny's duplicates followed suit and tried scouting the areal for whoever had screams a second before. Danny's ghost sense didn't warn him of any ghost's, but even if it warned him, it would be impossible to tell if he caught Skulker's or not.

The teen suddenly got a dreadful idea of what, or better *who*, could have coursed all the havoc, when one of the opposite team came running out from the bushes, arms attached to his torso by a ecto-strain.

He screamed like a girl, when a wire made him fell on his face and send him upside down by the leg, hanging from a tree. Skulker came out of the woods with a wicked grin and aimed at the man with something looking suspiciously like a Fenton bazooka.

Danny jumped out of hiding, "did you seriously steal from my dad's van?"

Skulker lighted up with bloodthirsty glee by the sight of his favorite prey and let the crying man go, ignoring him as he wormed away, just to fall into a hole in the ground, covered by leaves.

More cries followed and one of Danny's duplicated could indeed confirm that several of the opposite team had fallen into the same hole.

"Skulker! It's supposed to be a bonding experience!" Danny yelled in vain, "what part of fun didn't you get!?"

The hunter grinned taking aim at both him and Vlad with a mad grin, “I’m sure those humans will bond just fine on their own in the cage back at my lair. Now stand still!”

Danny moved by reflex to protect the nearest human, which in this case was Vlad, when the man moved faster than him and shot Skulker, making him fall down into his own hole.

The man wasted no time and ran rather nimble through the woods, dodging all the roots and tree branches like a soldier in the field, while Danny turned intangible to prevent getting slapped by branches every other second.

Vlad threw himself behind a cover and recharging his gun, when Danny phased through him, making the man shudder.

“Gahhh! Stop being a nuisance, Daniel and try being useful – I have enough on my plate as it is!”

Danny summoned his duplicates and circled the man, “what exactly do you got on your plate! What is happening? What are you panning? – why are the Cube guards here of all places and why now!?”

Vlad ignored him and stepped up to push his way through, “I don’t have time for your useless questions, boy. Move out of my way or I'll shoot.”

Danny spread out, all duplicates rolling their eyes in unison, “yeah like you could actually hit something with that thing. You got lucky because Skulker was right in front of you.”

Vlad lifted an unimpressed eyebrow and shot the duplicate next to the teen. The headshot right between the eyes made the duplicate role its eyes back over and dissolve back to nothing. All the Phantoms’ stared in horror, slowly turning to the man in their midst.

Vlad recharged with a smirk.

“What? Thought I filled my mountain chalet with brought hunting trophies, my boy?”

Danny had. He had been jumping to the conclusion that Vlad had

been the complete indoor-type of creep – the many pelts and heads on his walls back in Colorado, had in Danny's mind, just been the leftovers from his animal-ghost-mutant experiments.

Not trophies that the man had actually hunted down himself.

Danny just stared at him, "you shot me."

The teen knew a paintball bullet wasn't deadly or anything, unless it was on very close range and maybe in the eye, but still… "how did you know it was a duplicate?"

The man took aim, "I didn't, but since you so kindly just gave it away…"

Three bullets echoed though the field and Danny's duplicates dissolved into him, letting him go through their death experience like a faint memory. Danny suddenly remembered the badger-ghost in Vlad's flock of mutants and felt a light shiver.

What had gone through the man's head when he'd shot that badger?

-

In the meantime, Tucker and Dora was having a romantic meal at a little coffee shop near the hotel and Tucker scrolled though his new messages.

Taking a sip of his wiped creamed coco and frowned, "funny, I'm getting tons of snaps from Sam, but non-from Danny."

Sam stared gloomy at him from the tweets, accompanied by texts like:

- Manicure – how stereotype

#WomanOpressionSupportedByNailshops #NoBlackNailpolish!

- Latte with the party – kill me

#BaristaIsGivingMeLooks #AskedHowIWantedMyCoffee #ToldHimToMatchMySoul

Tucker snorted, but was a little relieved to see that the goth's mood was lighting up, as the party had gone out shopping and Arianna, Ember and Kitty had run into Hot Topic store with her. Dani posed on a picture with full goth makeup, including black lipstick and lether pants.

#AllReadyOnePlateauShoesInTheGrave #Ghost-girl #DaniWithAn'I'

The last shot so far had been a snap of Arianna tipping a female stripper with a huge grin, while Valerie had covered Dani's eyesight. Her own green eyes the size of dinner plates.

Tucker fund a snap and whistled, "did you know Vlad send the Fright Knight to spy on them? Dani discovered him and he had a manicure with them, both him and the horse. His paying the male-strippers in gold tokens…"

Tucker scrolled through the rest and sighed, "still no tweets from Danny though. Dude, what are you doing?"

Dora scrolled trough her own PDA and leaned over, "well, according to Skulker's Instagram, they're still out playing paintball right now."

Tucker lifted an eyebrow, "Skulker's on the net?"

Dora played with her hair and made a sheepish smile, "I've hooked him up yesterday, I thought it be good for him, look – he seems happy."

Tucker looked through the hunter's past tweets, not sure that he would use the word "happy" in this situation. That smile was pretty damn wicked.

Most of the tweets was either the ghost flexing his abs, couple photos of him and Ember, or post of his kills, weapon upgrades, more kills and refurnishing of his ghost lair due to new pelts and trophies.

The last tweets were from the Bachelor-party, the glamoured hunter smiling like a madman, with fearful humans cowering in the back.

*- I PUT THE **PAIN** IN PAINTBALL!!!*

#TheGhostZonesGreatestHunter #MyGlamuorWasLikeThisWhenIWokeUp #Blessed

“Yikes,” Tucker said and sipped of his cup, “well at least he’s not hunting Danny.”

Dora paled, not sure if she should show her boyfriend the next tweet, “hey, how about we just put down the electronics and chat instead?”

Tucker wriggled his eyebrows, making Dora giggle, “all for you my juicy pork chop.”

Dora grinned like the good girl she was and placed some of his whipped cream on his nose. Tucker smeared it over her cheek, making her laugh harder and silent her with a loving kiss.

Back on the PDA screen, the picture of Skulker trying to throw an angry Vlad of his back remained and in the background Danny blasted him and had his duplicates saving the hunter’s victims.

The duplicate who had taken the picture posed with a wide grin and peace sign in the corner.

- It’s called ‘beat and release’!

- Got shot in the head four times and saw my life pass before me – 10/10

- Vlad’s a hunting nerd – he even tasted a track – WTF!

#TheFriendlyGhostHeroOfAmityPark #V-ManTheMonkeyManDoesWhateverAMonkeyManDoes!

The duplicate stored the phone away for later emergencies and shot opportunities, before jumping back into the fight. Vlad was sparring with the hunter, while Danny tried getting some serious blast in.

“I’m your boss and I order you to surrender!”

“This is an arena and outside of my employment contract, you can’t tell me wat to do!”

Vlad growled dangerous, before suddenly widening his eyes and

grinning sinisterly. The rings around his waist unfolded and Plasmius took his place, now hand-wrestling the other ghost and winning.

Danny couldn't believe they had been playing paintball for three hours straight! – although Danny had to admit, it had turned more into a hunter-ball, than anything else.

"Just finish him already!" Danny yelled.

Plasmius didn't let him tell him twice and send the hunter into unconsciousness with a cringing head-butt.

Skulker fell unconscious and the last human's scrambled for their lives and fled. Both halfas turned back to human in time for Jack to run out of the field's undergrowth to greet them. He grinned triumphantly with a red flag waving after him, "I got the enemies flag!"

The two halfas trying to hide Skulker's fallen form shared a long look, before both just gave the man a thump up.

Looks like they had won.

Chapter 20

The soft light of the bar laid an almost calm hue over the four men sitting by the bar, with each glass in front of them. Well three and a half / one alive, one dead and two on the edge – all in each state of alcohol poisoning.

The Bachelor party seemed to have come to its final and in the best man's opinion, that was about time.

They had left the paintball center faster than conmen at a police raid and the two halfas had even kept up the appearance as they'd carried the unconscious Skulker back to the RV, without using any visible ghost powers.

But that haven't stopped Jack Fenton from praising them for their incredible strength, when the two lithe halfas had thrown the hunter into the backseats without breaking a sweat. Vlad had taken the front seat by accident ending up next to Jack.

"You know, Vlad, this is actually the perfect opportunity for me to tell you a little something, I have waited to tell you for a long time."

Vlad visible froze, not sure what to expect at this point, "I see?"

"Okay it goes like this; when a man loves a woman –"

"For god sake!"

"No, no hear me out, Vladdy – when a man loves a woman and decide to devout himself to her for the rest of his life, it's like the beginning of a journey. A journey just the two of you. For me and Maddie it was like a haunted site trip, just like my father before me and his father and his father who wanted to become a gardener, but failed and went back to ghost-hunting."

Danny could alone from the backseat fell the anger radiate from the older halfa and wondered how his father manage to oversee it completely.

Jack continued without taking notice of the nasty looks the other was

giving him, “this journey will have its ups and downs, probably times without shelter or working toilets, but I’m getting ahead of my self – this woman you found –”

“What about her?” Vlad had asked warningly, clearly set on defending his wife if his college friend dared to step wrong on his words now.

Danny had watched them like a spectator at a badminton match. Skulker groaned slightly behind him and the teen shushed him, “not now, you’ll ghost it up.”

“She’s not like those other women I have seen you with and I think we both know you could get any gal in this world if you wanted. You have always been the one of us with the good look and charm, what woman wouldn’t say yes to your hand in marriage?”

Vlad had pinched his nose and Danny deadpanned, both of them could come up with a certain name rhyming with “patty” and ending with “Fenton”.

“But that’s the thing about that woman of yours, she doesn’t look like the kind of woman who just let herself be picked up like that. They are rare, but there are those women who can’t be charmed or persuaded with money or fame. I think she chose you because she saw past all that. I think she chose you because she wanted to go on that journey with you, Vlad.”

Vlad had looked up. A sincerely stunned expression filled his slender face, by the words of the man he had hated for more than twenty years and sworn to take a painful revenge on.

Jack had just padded his shoulder and turned back to the road, just in time to stop before he ran over four bikers.

Jack had hummed in the silence, suddenly a frown plastered his face.

“Funny, I always thought I would save the marriage-talk for Danny,” he had then turned around, while Vlad grabbed the wheel in panic, “you better catch up, son, or V-man gonna leave you behind and get kids before you!”

Danny had made a hysteric frown, “what!?”

Vlad had stayed silent for most of the trip, as they reached the next destinations, according to Danny bachelor-party schedule. The only one unaware of the change of atmosphere was his father who had carried on like always.

The casino had been quite funny and Vlad had ended up paying for them all, after Jack lost a couple of bucks at the roulette – they couldn’t leave before they payed – which again had been a job for Vlad’s bottomless credit card.

The card had come into action against when they had needed cool cash to get in the strip club later on.

Skulker had taken the whole experience pretty calm, if not sober after the paintball incident. After the brutal wakeup call from a still fuming Vlad, Skulker had begged for forgiveness and humbly asked if he could keep his job.

Vlad had granted a pardon for the hunter, but made it clear that this wasn’t a line the ghost could cross ever again. No on messed with Plasmius and especially not when he was as unstable as now. Danny could almost see his flossed nerves wave in the wind.

Danny still hadn’t come closer to what Vlad was panning behind those closed doors of his or how the Cube was part of it. The teen made ready to use one of his last resort at the strip club. Making one of the strippers give the groom a lap dance and film it as blackmail.

Vlad beat him to it and the three grown men laughed as a flustered Danny was trying to disappear into the chair, while a blond woman in spandex danced around him and moved her legs like a playboy’s dream.

Danny almost ran the second his twenty minutes was up and all but lifted the others out back to the RV, when a smirking Vlad had offered to buy him a new round.

Back at the bar, Danny scratched his itchy hair and coughed when more glitter fell out of it and covered his shirt, “ugh…it will take

months before I stop shimmering like some stuck-up twilight vamp."

"Someone get some whisky in the whelp before he loses his balls," Skulker grinned and the bartender complied, not asking for Danny's ID once.

The teen still hadn't figured out if the bartender served him because the bar was empty except from them, or due to the visible ghost-guns and weapons both Skulker and his dad was carrying around.

The alcohol was clearly starting to take hold of his dad, but not Danny and Vlad, even though they had taking equal turns and the same amount of alcohol.

He suspected that Vlad was almost immune to alcohol, with all the wine he consumed these days, but that didn't explained why Danny wasn't affected at all. Even Skulker was beginning to lose up, but he had brought his own stash in several flasks hidden around his cloths.

Danny suspected by the sweet smell, that it was the same they served at the infamous Christmas truce and wisely refused any of the content. That stuff worked twice as fast on halfas as on normal ghosts.

The only sober part of the party chose to sit it out, while Jack and Skulker decided to play dart, both surprisingly good at it, taking into account that both was downright wasted.

Vlad drowned the last of his vodka while Danny watched him closely, "well I understand why you don't get all shitfaced since you drink like a well, but how come I'm sober? Is It a halfa thing?"

"We burn it before it can affect our system," Vlad retorted softly, giving the bartender a sign to one more, "our human form will only accept what's fueling its power, since its cooperating with our ghost core. An alcohol poisoning wouldn't benefit us and the core burns it away immediately. It's actually quite simple, we're solely above human biology and superior to our race. We're resident to alcohol due to our incredible high metabolism, it's quite fascinating."

Danny rolled his eyes, "yippee, aren't we special."

“Don’t be so dramatic, Daniel, you’ll soon see the advance in your situation, when you let go of that heroism of yours. Just look at dear Danielle, she had accepted her status as a ghost-hybrid and realized the advances of living with her own kind.”

There was a silent offer in that rant and Danny wasn’t slow to grasp the little invitation wedged in between the lines. This man wasn’t subtle, geez.

“Thanks, but no thanks, I like my life and the course its taking by itself, have it my way – you know like at Burger Kings? I have my life menu and you have yours, place stay on your plate, thanks.”

Vlad chuckled, “those teen wits of yours will get you killed some day, little badger. You’re lucky I find it amusing.”

“And you're lucky I haven’t beaten the shit out of you – you’re still lying and scheming, are you seriously going to hand over your wife and daughter to the Cube?”

Vlad pinned him down with a strained glare, “is that really what you think of me? That I would hand over my family to slavery and torture, for the sake of what? Gold? Influence? A VIP box at the arena?”

“Sounds like you – it has ‘fruitloop’ all over it.”

The two amateur dart champions returned to their seats and prevented any further talk. Jack took one of the glasses, before realizing it was Vlad’s and put it back, “sorry V-man, almost took yours, it’s kind of like the mouth-wash incident all over again.”

Vlad riled up like an angry cat, “we don’t talk about the back-wash incident, I’ve told you!”

“What *is* the back-wash incident?” Danny asked his dad curiously.

The topic had been taken up so many times without a further explanation. First time when Vlad confessed his love for his mother at the chalet and later these past days. It sounded like good blackmail material, maybe just the nail he needed to hit Vlad’s talking nerve.

“It’s a-actually a funny story,” his dad slurred, leaning heavy against Danny, “me and V-man here was at a college party and flipped a coin to see who would be driving the gang home…”

Vlad buried his face in his hands, clearly given up on them all and this whole bachelor party to his honor. Danny couldn’t blame him, this sounded promising.

“I lost, but didn’t wanted to be that nondrinking guy at the party, so I did that trick female bartenders do when their customers have them drink with them, but they have to stay sober to work. So I g-got an empty beer bottle and every time I would drink something, I spite it out and into the beer bottle, looking like I was drinking from it.”

Danny got a feeling where this was going and felt the laughter beginning to work its way up.

“At some point at the party, I accidently switched my bottle with the one beside it, turned out it was Vlad’s –”

Vlad shook his head, stilled hidden in his hands, while Jack was having a hard time keeping his speech up without laughing, “poor Vlad almost drown the bottle before he realized it wasn’t beer and spat it out in the face of Chrish Halling and threw up on his shoes to. The guy beat us up and we started a bar fight – even got a police report for having started street events. College was wild, you see when you get there.”

Danny was laughing along with Skulker and dried a tear of his eye, “can’t wait.”

Both dart players returned to their game, when the round of shots had been passed and Danny eyed the billionaire with a smirk, “just how much are you willing to tell me, to keep this from getting out to everyone else?”

Vlad removed the hands from his face and matched Danny gaze, but with a solemn expression of arrogance, “its cruel, my boy, but not cruel enough. You will have to do better and I think the time is running out of this little game of ours.”

Danny scowled, not content with being rubbed of his victory yet again, “I’m not cruel, Vlad, but I can’t let you hurt them either. If you really love them, you wouldn’t keep secrets and make schemes behind their backs. That’s not how you treat your family.”

Vlad laughed. A dark and pitiful on at Danny’s expense, “says the boy who lives with the world’s leading ghost experts, not telling them that their own son is a half-ghost?”

He felt like Vlad had just slapped him. Tapped something that he had no right to. Danny tried to harden his gaze, but lost the fight and looked away.

Vlad nodded to himself, “that’s what I thought. I think we both can agree that family can be hard to protect and most times we have to secure their safety by keeping them in the dark.”

Danny gritted his teeth. He didn’t like being corned up like this and especially not by Vlad Masters of all people, but it seemed like the man had a special talent for it. His silver tongue always worming its poisonous and toxic words into his mind and make him doubt himself.

Telling him to let go of his values, let go of his parents and let go of his own righteousness. Vlad made it sound so easy.

If Danny just let go of being a hero in a town that only respects him to some extent and just being selfish for once in his live and actually take the man’s hand, he would become stronger, safe and most of all…appreciated.

He had got the taste of what it could be like when he met Arianna, but never really surrendered to the whole experience of it. She hadn’t minded though; she hadn’t demanded anything, or any sacrifice of him.

She didn’t try to change him or asked him to join some side, that meant he had to give up on others. She just showed him that life didn’t have to be difficult on him and life didn’t have to be hard on you just because you were half dead.

She had showed him that there was a golden middle path to this, where Vlad only offered him black and white options.

Danny had promised himself to never fall into corruption and reached the path Dan had made out for him, but he could allow himself to stray from the path once in a while when the time demanded it of him.

And this was one of them.

“Vlad, do you still want me as a son?”

The man froze, clearly not expecting something like that and placed the glass on the counter with a steady hand.

“Yes. You belong with us, Daniel. I still want you to be my son, just like Arianna wants you to be part of our family.”

Danny nodded at that, now he had that cleared out, it was time to do something he had only promised to take up as an absolute last resort.

“Then let’s make a deal. You tell me what’s really going on and fill me in for the future, without exceptions and I come live with you guys in Wisconsin, instead of living at the university dorm after my graduation.”

Danny knew the man would be a complete idiot not to take this offer and Vlad grinned, caught off guard, “now that is cruel, Daniel. That is cruel.”

“Well?”

“I accept,” Vlad tuned ninety degrees in his chair and folded his hands businesslike, “but let’s get everything cleared out between us first. What I am about to tell you and inform you in the future about the situation and it development, will be between the two of us and *stay* with the two of us. Do I make myself completely clear?”

Danny knew the man couldn’t force Danny to stay on his end of the deal, but there was a simple message in the man’s eyes, a promise speaking louder than words.

Danny would regret not keeping his end of the deal.

Danny gulped, nodding. Not going to ruin this with silly banter or wits.

“And furthermore, I’m holding you to your end of the deal. The papers will be signed tomorrow and the dorm you were enrolled at, canceled and your addressed changed for good. Your luggage will be moved the day after your graduation and you will live under my house, my home and my rules.”

Danny was going to object, but Vlad gave him no such chance, “do I make myself absolutely clear?”

Danny clenched his fists under the bar chair. *Do it for them, do it for them, do it for them*… “yes.”

Danny felt a bad taste in his mouth as they shook hands, but knew it would be worth it in the end.

“Well then,” Vlad started, making sure his college buddy was occupied and wouldn’t interrupted, “I have for a longer period of time, since Arianna’s escape to be precise, kept the Cube from entering all portals to the northern states, our ghost-portals include –”

“Wait *what?*” Danny tried to take all that in at once, “you been guarding all the portals to the human word around here? *All of them?* But that would take an army or –”

“I manage with my army of duplicates and a handful of payed ghost mercenaries. Actually the hardest part was getting around those sieges they made around every portal and wait for them to exhaust themselves after a couple of months.”

Danny remembered the signs of one of those sieges, when he had sneaked past the last remaining one outside his own portal, when he sneaked with Sam into the Ghost Zone to safe Tucker from being marriage to Dora.

The ghosts had almost left the site, but the trace of a lot bigger army had been visible.

“I had hoped to have heard the last of them, but then I received a messenger sent by Runner, informed me that he wanted Arianna back and the Cube demanded your head on a stick. Apparently you insulted them quite a bit, my boy.”

Danny scowled and Vlad sighed tiredly, “if I don’t respond to their demands, the Cube will tear their own portal into our world and drag us all back to the Cube. They don’t know about Danielle or her existence, but I fear she could be an easy target for them if she moved out of my sight.”

Danny felt the little hair rise on his skin with goosebumps, “they can make their own portal?”

“I think they're bluffing,” Vlad stated with a deep frown, “I have never heard of such a thing before or found it in any lore about the Ghost Zone. If it was possible for ghost other than the few gifted like yourself, who can make a small portal for five seconds or more, it would take an enormous amount of energy of a single ghost or a concentrated group with the same powers and strengths – so I wouldn’t count on that. But it is a threat that can’t be turned the blind eye to. The Cube’s guard patrol has followed us here and I have been forced to place duplicates all over the land to keep them from finding us.”

He sent Danny a strict look, “well, that was until you stunned me with your little Fenton-ghost-drainer as you insist on calling it. For three hours, the Cube’s guards were free to search the country and track us back to this part of the land.”

Danny could only offer him a sheepishly smile. Whoa, he had really fucked up. Like literally fucked everything up. Shit.

“I managed to lure them back to the Faroe Islands up north, but that won’t fool them for long. As soon as the wedding is over, I plan to move us back to Wisconsin and the ghost defenses I have rebuilt around the castle. If I and now We, are lucky and keep this to ourselves, Arianna and Danielle should be safe and out of danger. They can’t know any of this.”

Danny frowned, “why?”

“Oh, come now, Daniel. What would Arianna do if she was informed that a huge squadron of Cube guards was heading her way and infiltrating her country? How do you think she would act, hmm?”

Danny sighed, easy question but annoying nevertheless, “she would go out there and kick their butts…”

“Colorful expression, but yes, she would go out defending herself, her family and her home. And at some point she would be caught and possible killed. I can’t allow that.”

Danny could follow that, getting nauseous by the mere thought of Arianna and Dani in the slave trader’s hands. Fighting for their lives to the applause of the masses. Maybe even against each other…

“So what now? What’s the plan?”

Vlad checked his wrist watched and the teen lifted an eyebrow, when it unfolded and made a screen. Fright Knight was seeing relaxing in a spa-tub. Complete with flower petals, face mask and cucumber sliced over the helmets eyeholes.

“Fright Knight, status report.”

The Halloween ghost jumped startled and lifted one of the cucumber slices.

“My liege!” he greeted sheepish and tried hiding the plate of chocolate and champagne next to him, even the ghost horse in the tub behind him looked a little baffled, *“the mistresses and her ladies is having a massage and plan to return to the hotel’s premises after their reservation at the spa restaurant. The entire party will be back at the hotel in three hours as planned.”*

Vlad simple nodded, clearly pleased to hear at least something was going after a schedule, “excellent, has any disturbances interfered or alarmed my wife and daughter?”

“No, my liege. The enemy has moved on from the capital and haven’t shown any sign of threat since midday.”

“Good, make sure they return safely and unknowing – I myself will

return to the hotel in an hour, report if you catch any sign of Cube guards."

Vlad cut the connection and the watch unfolded back to its expensive looking self, "sounds like the Cube is still lured. The ghost shield around the hotel should keep them out for tonight and secure us a good night sleep before the wedding tomorrow – I'll say it's time to return, Badger."

Vlad went for the tipsy hunter, who was filling the bartender with creepy bragging about his latest kills and trophies, clearly scaring the poor man, while Danny went for the bathroom to get his dad.

"Dad, the party's over it's time to go home!"

There was no answer and Danny moved further in to the men's bathroom and tried getting some of the glitter out of his face and hair in the dirty mirror over the sink, "come on dad! We have to get up tomorrow for the wedding – remember?"

Still no answer. Danny gasped when blue mist left his mouth and ran to the only locked stall.

He forgot to use his ghost powers and simply kicked the door in. Had it been under other circumstances, he would have taken a second to stop and admire his own skills, but his own durability had no place in his mind, as he took in the sight of the empty stall.

The Fenton-Ghost-Grabber laying abandoned on the toilet seat. It was turned on and Danny lifted it with shaking hands.

It held a message.

Itd monotone woman's voice droned, *"bring the ghost-boy to the harbor alive or the fat human will take his place on the stick – fear me!"*

Chapter 21

Dan stared at the tower's screens with a frown, what could've easily been determined as a mix of confusion and complete This-Is-Bullshit-I-Can't-Believe-I'm-Watching-This look.

The big specter scratched the purple cloak covering his head and back, making the fabric rustled quietly along with the calm crackling sound of his flaring hair.

The Master of Time watched his lover and time-novice from a distance, taking in the man with amused eye swimming with red humor.

Dan looked good in that timekeeper cloak.

"How is time going for the dimension?"

Dan didn't take his eyes from the screen, just snorting in frustration, "those two idiots is out saving that bid fat human buffoon. This is so stupid. The whole situation is so god damn plain simple! – just go out there, meet the Cube guards at the harbor and kill them with an ambush, but noooo," the specter spat irritated, "instead they end up making a fucked-up competition of who can track down the human first. The kid even called Valerie Grey to be his hunter. Now their running around like idiots through town and ruining each other's chances to find the human – and for what? Rivalry? Can't they just kill each other and get it over with?"

Clockwork chuckled at that, "and you tell me my job is easy, I can't tell you how many times I've wanted to meddle and just push them in the right direction, but it has its charm – look, they stumbled into each other again."

They watched as the two hunting parties yelled incomprehensible at each other and quarreled with raised fists. Next to the two halfas, Valerie made the death glare at which Skulker replied to by clenched his fist with a dark grin, clearly up for a challenge.

The two halfas bantered on, while the two hunters sized each other

up and silently compered the other to themselves.

“Interesting,” Clockwork whispered, zooming in on the two hunters and leaving the halfas be, “it’s not often that those two have interactions in these dimensions. It’s disturbingly rare, despite they both center around Phantom as hunters and meet on different occasions.”

Dan snorted, making a scissors move under both hunter’s heads, acting like he was cutting their necks, *“snip.”*

“If I recall correctly, they were both centered around you in your former timeline as well.”

Dan froze his childish play pretend massacre of the screens participants and scowled, he didn’t like talking about his lost timeline, “I’m not sorry for what I did to them, if that’s what you’re fishing after, old fool.”

The master of time just laughed at that. Despite his novices and other’s high thoughts of him, he felt no obligations to correct Dan’s previously actions.

Justice was a curious thing, the right choices and right paths of life was off course always the way of life that the old ghost wished for all his subject to go down, but that didn’t mean that the old specter couldn’t enjoy a little path straying from time to time.

In his past, Clockwork had at selected occasions abused his own powers and control of time to do as he wished and create imbalance for his own amusement or curiosity. Killing others was not stranger to him, than defending the weak and he found righteousness and likeness in both.

The thing about watching one’s own and other’s different timelines and lives, made it impossible not to dive into other’s personal lives and come to know them better than they ever would themselves.

All lives mattered just as they at other times didn’t meant more than that of a grain of sand in a desert. The many dimensions and twists of time decided who would get to play a key role in the balance and

who would parish without a trace.

Such was time, such was life.

The keeper of time could only accept this and observe – and occasionally hold on to the little treasures he stumbles upon in his path. He liked collecting souls and follow them for his own amusement and childish curiosity. He glanced to Dan and placed a caring hand on the other's back.

He would defiantly keep this one for the rest of the eternity.

Dan didn't stiffen but relaxed into his hand. He could claim that he hated and wished a painful downfall on his younger alternative self all he wanted, but he couldn't fool Clockwork. Dan had taking a likening to timekeeping and the tempting world that was time control.

This pleased the old specter. Taking the dangerously specter in had been a gamble that could have ended badly for him, but now he wouldn't have change a thing.

Dan watched him out of the corner of his eye and smirked by the sight of the purple blush on the time keeper's cheeks.

Clockwork was ripped from his inner monologue, when the taller specter pulled him in and stroke his back and cheek possessively, "for someone who destroyed my timeline, you surely like to rub it in my face a lot."

"It's important to remember one's past," Clockwork purred, feeling the other's hand wander. Dan's canines unfolded over his dark smile, "be careful, timekeeper. Maybe I haven't entirely given up on my past yet."

Clockwork chucked darkly, drawing the other closer, "that's what I have the old thermos for."

The dark specter bit his lover's lower lip harder than necessary and drew ectoplasm, before deepening the kiss with force. The timekeeper grinned into the brutal ministration and wrapped his ghost tail around the other's midsection.

Didn't protest as he was forced up against the tower's cobblestone wall. The timekeeper hissed in pleasure as Dan's fangs pierced his neck and sucked on the punctures, his burning forked tongue dragging heated bands over Clockwork's skin and marking his chest with bruises.

The sound of the ticking clockwork in his chest beat faster and Dan growled animalistic, forced the other's head back, eyeing him with flaring eyes.

"If I should ever return to that cage, then you will be there to share it with me, that's a promise."

Clockwork smirked, "don't mind if I hold you up to it."

The dark Phantom laughed ominous and took the other's mouth back into possession. While the timekeeper chose to phase Dan's hazmat suit of him, the cold fire specter simply ripped his cloths to sheds.

Behind them, the screens moved along without any knowledge of their activity and the sight of Danny Phantom and the Red huntress came into view…

-

…"I can't believe you actually talked me into this," Valerie sneered, keeping it down, as they watch Vlad talk to the Cube's ghost guards from there hideout behind a ship container, "and why the hell can't I tell any of it to Dani again?"

Danny shushed her, "keep it down – if Dani finds out that there's crazy slave traders out for us, she'll just ends up doing something stupid, or worse, tell Arianna! This have to be between us – you can't tell her, promise?"

Valerie lifted a perfect eyebrow, "okay, let me specify my question – why would *I* tell Dani? I get that I can't tell this to anyone, that includes Sam and Tucker, but you keep mention Dani specific? What's the deal?"

Danny gave her an incuriously look, "wait…you two aren't dating?"

Valerie blushed so hard it surprised Danny that her visor didn't misted up with condensation completely, "*what!?* Who says that!"

Danny rolled his eyes, "duh, everyone – you two keep hanging out and you always have at least one hand on her. Dani talks about you nonstop and you even have her as your background image on your phone!"

Valeri turned almost the same color as her suit and punched his shoulder, "don't spy on me like that, you little creepy ghost-boy. We're just friends!"

"Whoa, you're clueless – trust me I've been there, I can recognize the signs of denial."

She punched him again and Danny wincing secretly, that girl threw some mean strikes.

She huffed and sat down behind the container, "even if I had a thing for her, it would be totally out of question."

Danny gave the harbor and Vlad's negotiations one last look, before he slid down next to her, "why?"

Valerie frowned, not meeting his eyes, "you and me dated, remember? Dating your cousin would be weird and if that's not weird enough, she's really your clone – practically you. Dating Dani would be shallow of me – everyone would think I was going out with her, because she looks like you, because she's you. I don't' even know if I like her because of her or because of what she looks like! I'll just hurt her in the end…"

Danny blinked, haven't really thought about it that way, "huh…I guess."

Danny remembered the time he and Valerie had dated and felt a little sting in his heart by the memory of the break up. He still had feelings for her, but just not the romantic ones.

Not anymore.

He had told himself that it had been for the best, they had only been

dating because Technus had played matchmaker and their divergent interests and double lives would never have worked out in the end.

There was too much bad blood between them and even now that things had been worked out between them, both could see why a romantic connection would be stupid. Seems like time did changed some things.

“I don’t think anyone would think of you as shallow, Valerie.”

She gave him a sour look, clearly telling him to elaborate or shut the fuck up, “you know how everyone has a type, right?”

She just nodded.

“Well, maybe your type is just raven-haired brats with blue eyes? I’ve heart most people like those.”

She snorted at that, trying to keep down her grin.

He grinned along, “but really, just because we’ve dated and you liked me at some point, doesn’t mean that you can’t have the same thing with Dani. I know she’s my clone, but trust me, other than that and some disturbing similarities, she a complete different person. Liking her for who she is, despise our lookalikes, doesn’t make you shallow. At least not in my world.”

She pursed her lips, deep in thought, “it would be okay with you? Me and Dani dating?”

“Already thought you did, remember?”

She scoffed with a slight grin and stood up, “I take your word for it then. Thanks, Danny.”

“Don’t thank me too soon – Dani’s still a minor so you’ll have to keep your hands of her until she’s 18 and there’s another thing…”

He pointed to Vlad, “Arianna thinks you two would be cute, but I’m not sure Dani’s new dad will let you crawl in her window at night.”

Valerie narrowed her eyes to slits, “we’ll see about that,” and charged

her weapon.

Danny grinned, oh he was *sooo* gonna let Arianna in on this, she would probably plant a ladder outside Dani's window in excitement and watch with a bucket of popcorn.

A low 'beep' made Valerie lift her head and she tapped in on the ghost radar, "okay the scanner is done and says there's a single human surrounded by ghosts on that ship."

She pointed to a containership and Danny nodded, turning them both invisible and intangible, phasing them down the concrete and over to the metal ship.

The inside of the ship was silent and dark, the peace only broken by the calm sound of the waves outside and the metal's natural groaning.

Valerie activated her hoverboard and hung in the air next to him, "alright, two stories up, there's three ghosts around him and one single guard on his way to this one. The rest is with the fake negotiations outside."

"Got it," Danny replied and took her hand, phasing them up three stories, before turning them both invisible and floated stealthy to the point of the human aura.

Two ghost guards turned around the corner and floated down the corridor. Danny and Valerie pressed themselves to the corridor's wall, waiting for the ghosts to pass. The two guards were facing forward without talking and passed Valerie without noticing her.

Danny breath in relief when the last one floated passed him and got the air caught in his throat, when the ghost grabbed him, "nice try, ghost-kid."

Danny fought back and got into a fistfight with the guard who looked back at his partner, "call the others!"

His partner nodded and pulled out a walkie-talkie, but then Valerie blasted him. Despite having been visible for a couple of seconds, none of the ghosts seemed to have noticed her in the first place, only

caught up on Danny's ghost signature.

Danny had thought these guys would be just a dumb as the ghost cops Walker kept at his prison, but was badly proven wrong.

The two ghost fought like trained material arts men and moved back to back, before pulling out glowing sticks. A caliber a lot bigger and meaner looking than the ones Walker's minions carried around.

Valerie kicked the walkie-talkie out of the ghost's hand, but was rewarded with a shock from his stick. Danny assembled his energy and made a portal. The two ghosts cried out as they fell through the floor and into the Ghost Zone and Danny kicked the sticks down after them.

He hurried to close the portal before they remembered that they could fly and jumped into the air, along with Valerie on her board, as the sound of shouts and commands could be heard around and above them, "come on!"

They shoot through the corridors on as high a speed as Valerie's board allowed and Danny grabbed her when he feared she was going to hit the walls, turning them intangible and shoot through five walls.

Both shrieked when they passed through a group of guards, feeling their sickly heat and possible their cores.

"After them!"

Valerie led him further into the ship, before she suddenly stopped, making Danny slam against a wall out of surprise and uncontrolled speed.

He picked himself up, "what the hell! They after us, why we stopped!"

"He's moving towards us!"

"What?"

"Your dad, his coming this way!"

Skulker appeared around the corner with a suspiciously huge sack on his back and grinned up at his phone. Cleary taking pictures and grinned to himself, “greatest ghost and human hunter – hashtag; best hunter, hashtag; man’s job –”

Valerie blasted him, sending the glamoured ghost flying and claimed the sack with the unconscious Jack Fenton, “who’s the best hunter now, hah!”

“Would you two get over yourself!” Danny cried and grabbed his father, letting him on his bag, “the guards are coming, we have to leave now!”

The two hunters pouted, but phased out of the ship along with him and returned to the harbor and that in tome to vitness the sight of ten Plasmius’ fighting off a smaller army of ghosts. The Fenton RV came at them with smoking wheel and Vlad peaked out of the front seat, “get in!”

No one let him say that twice and phased into the car. Vlad pressed the car at full throttle with squealing wheels and led them back on the road. Danny flipped the rearview mirror and found that a group of ghost was hot on their heels, “Vlad, they’re coming!”

“Get the blaster on the roof and activate the ecto-seeking lasers, Daniel.”

Danny wasted no time and followed order immediately. The lasers made the persecutors spread out of formation and Danny found the joystick to the blaster, took his aim on the little screen in front of him.

Behind him, Valerie was checking his father’s pulse, trying to get him back to consciousness, while Skulker leant out the window and fired his own weapons, “Skulker is no one’s prey!”

Before them, the sun was slowly setting and the first cars driving out on the street.

Vlad was a far safer driver than his dad, but not even a responsible driver could be expected to steer a car with 270 per hour and avoid

sleepy morning drivers at the same time, without it being a vehemently ride.

Vlad made a sharp turn to go to the opposite traffic lane in order to avoid an attack and turned the entire RV intangible as two trucks came at him side by side. The two trucks honk at him and Valerie paled a bit as they drove right through them.

Jack groaned slightly from the backseat and Valerie could relax a bit, “his okay, just a hangover.”

Danny activated the RV’s GPS, when Vlad shot down a small street, to narrow to let two cars pass one another. The small streets shook some of the persecutors of, but far from all of them and Danny tapped the hotel’s address into the GPS and turned it to Vlad, “turn left two streets from here!”

Vlad made a shortcut by phasing the car through five houses, surprising their residents, who were performing their morning rituals. Vlad followed the instructions and got back to the wider road, “what time is it?”

Danny blasted two ghosts and checked his phone (his dad had hidden his and Vlad phone in the RV’s glovebox), “it’s 7:30.”

Vlad hissed, “butter brickle! One hour before the wedding – hold on tight!”

The RV pressed to the very limit of 350 km and Danny felt the pressure forcing him back into the seat. The ghost behind them fell behind for a moment before they got their own speed up and shot after them on the straight extent before the hotel.

Vlad kept pressing the speeder and Danny saw the speed arrow give up on them. Vlad brought his wristwatch to his face, “activate ghost shield 1D238 and accept signature DP, VP and SK – all humans allowed!”

Danny gasped as a huge green force field unfolded over the hotel and reached the ground like a fluid curtain, just in time for them to reach its border and pass through.

Vlad stopped the RV with shrieking brakes, almost making it flip over, as their persecutors tried to stop themselves, but ended up smacking against the shield and was shocked like moths on an electric lamp.

The smell almost made Danny vomit and Valerie covered her mouth and nose with disgust. The ecto-green spots on the shield slowly burned into nothing and the shield became invisible.

“Did we just…are they…holy shit…” Danny whispered shocked, but got no real time to wonder about the whole situation, when Vlad grabbed both him and Valerie by their cloths and ran for the hotel’s entrance.

“No time for that, we have a church to arrive at and my wedding to attend – get dressed, you have twenty minutes!”

Skulker ran up to them with Jack on his shoulders and followed Vlad to his suite, while Danny and Valerie ran rather disorientate to their rooms in sheer panic and bottled up adrenalin.

Nineteen minutes and five seconds later, the group was back at the hotel’s parking lot, now dressed to the nines and more than frantic as they jumped into the RV.

Jack had been dressed by Danny and Skulker and the man looked around with a huge headache and swimming eyes, “what time is it?”

“7:49, dad, here take some painkillers.”

Apparently no ghost had survived meeting Vlad’s ghost shield, but the man pressed the car to the limit nevertheless, now racing against time instead of ghosts.

The GPS said the trip by car to Our Saviour's church could be done in five minutes without traffic, but Danny was pretty sure the man just broke all record and made it with two.

The dented ecto-stained RV parked next to the limo in front of the church and everyone jumped out and ran to the entrance where the bells was calling to assemble.

A huge group of paparazzi and reporters waited outside the doors and would possible have made it impossible to get through to the church, had it not been for ghost powers.

Valerie blinded Jack with the bag from the RV, making him disorientated long enough for Danny to turn both her and his dad intangible and flew invisible into the building.

He felt Skulker and Plasmius' signature pass him by and Danny lowered the two humans on the stone floor.

Jack ripped the bag from his head and look around in confusion, "man I'm never touching vodka again."

"Jack!" Maddie Fenton called as she appeared in her long blue dress and jewelries. She scowled at the sight of their tired poses and grabbed her son and husband, "you two party-animals better find your seats and that fast, the ceremony is about to begin!"

Danny's eyes suddenly widened, "oh, fuck I'm supposed to be at the alter!"

Sam and Tucker waved at him as Danny ran the last range up to the alter and took his place as the best man, while the bridesmaids waited fresh and rested in their hideous getups.

Danny scouted the crowed and found a lot of new faces he recognized and other's he didn't knew – most of them on the bride's side.

Johnathan sat in the front of the bride's rows next to his boyfriend, along with a lot of people that held some resembles with Johnathan and Arianna in one way or another, but most of them white.

Most of the groom's rows were occupied by men and women in fancy attire, looking either rich, famous, important or all of the above. But the most protruding guests however, were undoubtedly those Danny knew personally by heart.

Jhonny13 smiled up at Kitty by the alter and shared space with Bertrand who was twisting a handkerchief in tension.

Next to him sat the Fright Night who was being given a couple of

looks, due to his armor and helmet, but he seemed content by being where he was and made sure not to scratch his new manicured nails.

What surprised Danny at little though, was to see Walker, Technus, Desiree and Youngblood and pretty much all the rest of the Ghost Zone on Vlad's side of the row. They were in glamour, but there was no doubt that it was them.

Other ghost sat beside them, but not any known by Danny and he settled his eyes on his family, along with Sam, Tucker, Valerie and Dora.

Skulker appeared next to Danny, taking up his place as the grooms alter company in a smocking that looked like it would break under the pressure of his abs and chest any second. Ember blew him a kiss from the other side of the alter and the hunter grinned.

The guest was beginning to be restless when the groom didn't show up and all breathed in relief as Vlad walked up the aisle to the alter and took his rightful place next to the middle-aged priest. Ember lifted her guitar and took a cool breath before playing.

Danny had expected some high-pitched guitar solo, but the music was smooth and quite traditional for a wedding.

Everyone turned around as the bride's entourage stepped in. Dani walked in as the first in a light cream dress and flower crown, spreading flower petals on the floor with a smile. Danny caught Valerie blush and rolled his eyes.

After Dani followed the bride and her father walking her the way up to the alter. Arianna smiled cheerily and look amazing in her white dress.

Her father walked slowly and Danny wondered if it was because of high age and maybe the unwillingness of the whole situation and the giving his daughter away thing that made him want to avoid reaching the alter for as long as possible.

Danny would put his money on the latter.

Vlad was shining with pride and something that unmistakably could

look like happiness, making Danny's stomach knot. He already knew they were husband and wife according to their demon contract, but being part of their wedding made it all so more real.

After today there would be no turning back.

He would have to live with Vlad for the rest of his live, if he wanted to be with other halfas.

Danny remembered what he had promised just a couple of hours ago and felt a light shiver. He was really going to live with the man after this summer. Ugh.

Arianna caught his troubled expression and winked at him, before kissing her father on the cheek and surpass to her soon to be husband's outstretch arm. Lars looked gloomy as he sat down beside his son.

Johnathan patted his shoulder in sympathy, not looking very happy either.

The priest got everyone attention and started his long rant in bad English about marriage, virtues and love in the eyes of god. Danny caught eye contact with Sam and both smiled with light blushing cheeks.

Dani rolled her eyes at him and gave him an elbow in the ribs, "not your wedding, dude."

The priest ended his speech and look out to the crowd, "should any of you know a reasons that this should not take place, so shall ye say and step forward now – Or be silent forever!"

Lars made a move to stand, but his son pressed him down with a hand on his should.

"Then I declare you now to be wife and husband before God and the people, you may now switch rings and kiss the bride."

Danny froze. He patted his pockets and felt his blood turn to ice in his veins. He'd forgot the rings.

A little box was placed in his hand and Skulker gave him a glance, before stepping back. Danny opened the box and found two gold rings inside and sighed in relief.

I owe you! He mimed to the ghost, who just grunted and Danny gave Vlad the rings.

The pair placed their rings on each other's fingers and Vlad removed the bridal veil of his wife and sealed the human ritual with a kiss. The guessed applauded and some of the ghost even whistling, making both Arianna and Vlad grinning widely.

Their human-halfs where now official married.

Chapter 22

The wedding party was going exactly as Danny had suspected it would.

Embarrassing.

“Uhm…what I like to say is…uhhh,” Danny stammered uncertainly, trying to come up with a speech off the cuff.

Vlad sent him an amused look from the table of honor and Arianna gave him an elbow rib, tell him to behave. She smiled at Danny and made an encourage nod.

Go on.

Danny blushed embarrassed. He really should have used the time to prepare a best man’s speech, instead of planning Vlad’s downfall, but what could you do?

Tucker was filming the whole thing while Sam was sending him an apologizing smile with her own phone recording it all. Danny couldn’t blame them. Who needed enemies, when you had friends like that?

Danny scowled at the guests, “okay, you know what? I didn’t plan any speech, so here its goes – Vlad, Arianna. I’m happy for you. I wasn’t at first, but I guess you suit each other better than I expected. I hope this day will be everything you hoped for… Can someone *please* take me out of my misery and make a toast!?”

The guests laughed, thinking he was joking.

He wasn’t.

The bride stood and raised her glass, which forced the rest of the party to do the same and understand that Danny’s plea wasn’t a question, but an order.

Danny drowned his champagne – the real stuff shipped from France and everything, and sat down with a sigh of great relief. Sam crocked

an eyebrow, “did you mean any of that?”

“Nope, I just wanted to get it over with.”

With Danny’s short, but sincerely speech, the round of speeches had come to an end and the dance floor opened. Vlad took his wife’s hand and opened up the dance floor with a romantic waltz.

Danny’s parents followed suit and soon most of the party’s couples had taken their spot on the dancefloor.

“My lady,” Tucker offered like some medieval knight to Dora and giggling she took his arm and waltzed with him.

Danny and Sam rolled their eyes, but realized soon enough that they were a couple to and Danny rubbed his neck, “uhh, you wanna –?”

“Come on, your charmer,” Sam replied with rolled eyes and dragged him out of his chair. Danny grinned and placed his hands on her hips when the music calmed and became a slow dance.

Sam smiled content, swaying slowly with him and suddenly snickered.

“What?” he asked.

“Do you remember the first time we danced like this, at the prom?”

Danny nodded and her purple eyes shone, “Tucker was pissed that he didn’t have a date, but backed out when Dora creeped up behind them. Look at them now.”

Two couples from them, Tucker was dancing around the ghost princess without any rhythm or pace to the music, but that didn’t seem to bother her at all. She copied his steps and the two of them looked like they had a mini party inside the rest of the party.

“Well I remember you telling me to keep my pant up, to,” Danny retorted with a grin and Sam let her hand wander to said garment.

“Yeah, and how’s that going for you?”

“Fine, mostly – but some goth girl of mine have gained a habit of ripping them down all the time – not that I complain or anything,” Danny replied and grinned when said goth flickered his forehead.

The song ended and a faster one took its place. Ember made a wild guitar solo opening from her podium and a couple of the guest whoop it up and brook into more modern dance.

Some of the more conservative guest made eyes, when the bride broke into a highly inappropriate dance around the groom, who stiffed, but then shrugged and went along, throwing her into twist and fast tango steps.

Kitty and Jhonny13 got their own part of the attention, when they started dancing Rock n’ Roll style, making wild kicks and a received a lot of looks when Johnny flung Kitty over his shoulder and they took turns making somersaults.

Danny and Sam jumped along with the young crowd to Ember’s tunes, including her singles; *“Remember”* and *“Girl's Night Out”*, where Jazz and Tucker all but screamed with glee.

Everyone cheered when Ember gave up the music to a boombox which speakers played “all the single ladies” and Arianna took the floor with her bridesmaids to dance along to Beyoncé’s choreography.

Danny soon felt sweaty and spend, and parted with Sam, who went for refreshments. Danny took a seat by random and ended up next to Lars.

The old Viking and fathyer of the bride smiled tired and watched as his son and his boyfriend had fun on the dancefloor, “they growing up so fast, it’s almost scary.”

Danny nodded to be sociable and took the beer the man offered him, “you're having fun, Mr. Vølver?”

The man nodded in a way that was both a yes and no, “I just wished it could have been different. Do you ever wish you could back in time and change something?”

Danny recalled the time he had asked Clockwork to help him prevent

Vlad from being hit by the portal in the first place and winced, “I kind of did that once and turns out that it makes more problem than solutions – plus there all the time paradoxes and shit you wish you could unseen. Can’t recommend it.”

The man gave him an incredibly look, “sorry, I keep forgetting that you’re the same as my daughter. You really time travelled? Did you meet yourself or some famous people?”

Danny shrugged, “just my evil alternative self and some roman people, plus ninjas I think – people from the past kinda sucks. I like my own time better – congratulations on your daughter by the way and becoming a grandfather to.”

Lars smiled widely, “Dani’s a good girl. I was afraid adopting a teenager would be too much of a handful for my little girl, but seems I was proven wrong. I keep forgetting that my daughter is a force not to be reckoned with.”

The old man smiled as he caught sight of his daughter, but the frowned when Vlad came into sight, “that’s why I can’t allow that man to change her. My son tells me you are not much of a fan of him either, can’t imagine why.”

“He’s a fruitloop,” Danny sighed, “but now he’s Arianna’s fruitloop, so I guess I’ll have to accept it. But that doesn’t mean I like it one bit, none of us does.”

They watched them dance for a time and Lars sighed, “I know there may be things she haven’t told me, I sense that there is more to the story about how Masters ‘helped’ her recover from her illness, but if she doesn’t want to tell me, I guess I just have to accept that.”

Danny patted the man’s back and Lars seemed to lighted a bit up, “the only thing that matters is that she’s happy and safe now. As long as he treats her right and keep her happy, I guess I can respect him as my son in law.”

Danny bit the inside of his cheek. Different from the man, Danny knew the entire story and all the parts Arianna had danced easily and elegantly over to spare her family and change their views of Vlad.

It still surprised Danny to no means that a woman who had been forced back to a deathly condition and kidnapped, just to become a prisoner for the second time in her life, would chose to return to her abuser after a successful escape and bind herself to him for life.

In Danny's world, such behavior could only be justified as a case of Stockholm syndrome, but Arianna was clearly everything but manipulated. She hadn't change one bit or succumbed to Vlad, she had just decided to marry him. It was that simple.

It drove him nuts.

The only reason he had used the offer of living with that psycho in the first place, was because Dani and Arianna would be there with him and keep the creep on his toes. That and it gave him an excuse to watch the man.

Who knew what he planned to do with a family consisting of halfas? Probably world domination – Danny would have better chances stopping Vlad if he was there to prevent it and could use Arianna as a shield at the same time.

Danny usually didn't need someone to defend him or hide behind anyone, but that woman could kick some serious ass and already had Plasmius wrapped around her little finger, which made the opportunity too conveniently to pass up.

Speaking about the sun, a red cheeked Arianna settled down at this table and fanned herself with a napkin, "why those gloomy faces? It's my wedding, lighting up!"

Danny snorted, "marrying Vlad is kind of digging your own grave – which makes this a funeral. Gloomy faces is usual required at those."

She tussled his hair with rolled eyes, "you say that now, but I think you have starting to warm up to Vlad, Danny. He told me you had some problems with your college dorm and will be moving in with us back in Wisconsin. I can't wait to have you come living with us, we will be like a family."

"I'm too old to be adopted and I'm gonna eat bloodblossoms before I

even get close to the idea of becoming relative with that nut-case."

"We'll see, kid. Dani and Vlad are more alike than I thought. It's so funny though, Dani has the same Florida-shaped birthmark as you, Danny. You're completely certain that you and Vlad aren't related? He has three marks on his hip shaped like Hawaii."

Lars sighed and Danny made a grimace," I did not need to know that."

She just shrugged and helped her father up from the chair, "kom nu, far, det er tradition at bruden danser med sin far.*"

Danny watched as they disappeared into the dancefloor and took a sip of his beer. He rose when Sam returned with some fancy hors d'oeuvre on a plate and joined her back at their own table.

At another table, Dani was watching the dancing people and stuffing her mouth with fancy little cake and sandwiches that probably had an even more fancy name, but she didn't really care. It tasted amazing and the size was sweet.

She dried her fingers in her dress and behave highly inappropriate for a lady, but that didn't keep a certain huntress from observing her with a dreamy look.

Dani took a sip her soft drink and send one of the waiter's a side-glance as he passed her with a tray of champagne. Vlad had forbidden her to drink alcohol and Arianna had sorta given him right, even though Danish kids normally started drinking alcohol at fourteen.

Dani didn't mind, she would take a coke over any drink any day and poured it down without a worry in the world.

She stopped when she caught the other's eyes in her glass reflection, "hey, Val, you never told me what Danny needed help with last night, was it anything important?"

Valerie's eyes darted a second, "oh that? Ehmm, no nothing special, Danny just needed help getting the other's back to the hotel – those guys were totally wasted. I had to help Danny carry his dad and

everything. Hah…”

Dani giggled and Valerie smiled a little wider.

The kid was cute. Way too cute for her own good.

Valerie didn’t know when the feelings for the little half-ghost had fist planted its seed in her, but it made her stomach fill up with butterflies and made her hands sweaty, in a way she only though possible in silly pop-culture and cliché love stories.

Valerie had never been much into dating or love for that matter.

When she had been an A-lister and been on the top of the popular food chain, she could have taken any person she would have desired and picked as she likes, but she had never really felt like dating anyone for real.

She had hung out with Kwan for the sake of reputation and been his date on various events, but both knew it was all for show, just like Paulina and Dash would play couple because of unsaid rules. The popular would only pair up with their own kind.

When she’d lost her status, money and place at the popular table, she had realized just how shallow it all was. How hollow being popular was. How empty fake friends felt.

None of it was real. It never had.

She had been bitter at first and pushed people away, been mean and sarcastic for the sake of self-pity.

When she started to talk Danny, she had treated him the same way, thought he was just like the rest, either over her and making fun of her, or below here, trying to pick the leftovers she had been reduced to.

It had been a long way, but time and patience had showed her that people could be different and care for you without ulterior motives, maybe even love you. The time she had shared with Danny had been…nice.

She didn't have to prove herself to him or step up to some standard that could only be brought with money and the right friends. It had been her first real relationship and one she still could look back on without feeling ashamed.

The breakup had been easy compared to other broken relationships she had gone through later on and even though she had felt something special for Danny, she still felt that it had been for the best.

She hadn't been ready to commit at the time and needed the space for ghost-hunting and personal development. Finding herself in the crazy living, that was defined by her two identities.

The Red huntress who served Mr. Masters, hunting ghosts at night and the part-time-job high school student, Valerie Grey, helping her father getting back on his feet by day.

Valerie had at some point thought she had figured it all out and when Masters assigned her the job of catching some puny little ghost girl, named after her nemesis, she had found no trouble carry on as she had done hitherto.

The evil ghost's life for a new apartment. It had sounded so easy.

Nothing about it had been easy.

When she looked at Dani, off course the first thing that came to mind was her resembles with Danny. Danny had told her that it was just a simple similarity, that it didn't matter and Valerie wasn't into the little ghost due to her old feeling for him.

But how did he know?

Both of them had that cuteness to them that made you wanna protect them from something, just anything. Both ate like animals and acted carefree, having their heads in the clouds and made sarcastic wits like their life depended on it.

It was annoying. It was sweet. It was too much for her.

If the similarity didn't fuck it up for Valerie enough, the fact that the

kid was a minor, not only by form, but in mind would probably do it. If anything Dani had told her was truth, Dani was only around four, just looking like a fifteen-year-old.

Did that make Valerie a pedo?

She shivered, pushing that thought back down to the unreachable subconscious of her mind, where it would rot with her fanfiction about that particular Nasty burger AU she had made in her darkest hour.

Never ship the Casper high raven mascot with the Nasty burger costume – bad Valerie! Bad! BAD!

“Hello! Earth to Val?”

The former Nasty burger worker snapped out of her inner turmoil and blinked confused, “oh, sorry, Dani. What?”

The little teen smirked, “I said I like your outfit, everyone is wearing skirt or dresses, but you came in dress pants and shirt. If I had known that was allowed I would have ditched my own dress for a pair of sweatpants and made it casual Friday.”

Valerie snorted, fiddled with her silk shirt and white dress pants. She really hadn’t thought much about it when Masters had chased them around the hotel, forcing them to grab whatever they could get and run to the RV.

“Thanks, but I think you should keep the dress. It suits you.”

Dani pouted but it didn’t look genuinely and Valerie snorted, “I mean it, with that long black hair of yours, your kind of look like Snow White or something.”

“To be Snow White, I would need some lame prince on a fat pony saving me from a hunter, a bunch of dwarfs who’s willing to stuff me in a transparent coffin and an evil stepmother planning to kill me,” Dani said with rolled eyes, “all I got is a stepmother who would fly me to Disney land herself, if I asked her, a gang of ghost getters that’s normal sizes humans, who would probably choose a soup thermos over a coffin and a hot hunter that use to date my hero. Life is so

unfair."

Valerie almost choked on her champagne. Dani thought she was hot?

"Do you wanna dance? I never danced before, but everyone else is giving it a try and I kind of feel left out of something," Dani continued, clearly not aware of her own Freudian slip and the impact it had on her interlocutor.

"As my princess demands," Valerie drawled mockingly and offered her hand.

Dani almost jumped out of her chair and dragged the huntress to the crowded dancefloor. Valerie had danced before, but wasn't quite sure how to dance with another female and just went with it.

Sure, she had dated another girl shortly back in Elmerton, but never got as far as to dance with her and Valerie almost snorted by the image of sporty abs-flexing Jessica Lee dancing in a ball gown.

Dani moved clumsy at first and keep stepping on Valerie's open toed hells, before getting the idea of just turning her feet's intangible under the dress and danced more freely.

To Valerie it felt like her feet was moving in and out of ice puddles, but considered the heat that was rising in the banquet facility, it was refreshing.

They both stopped as the light was dimmed and Ember's voice filled the speakers, "alright lovebirds, this is the last dance and for that I call a slow dance."

"What's a 'slow dance?'" Dani asked confused, "are we just dancing slower, as in slow-motion? Like in space? Is it moonwalking?"

Valerie bit her lips not to laugh and pulled the smaller female a little closer, making her sway with her in rhythm to the soft music and plaintive voice.

“Some people live for the fortune. Some people live just for the fame.
Some people live for the power, yeah. Some people live just to play the game.
Some people think that the physical things. Define what's within.
And I've been there before. But that life's a bore. So full of the superficial!”

Dani giggled and swayed along with the huntress. Valerie twilled Dani around and felt a lump in her throat. What was she doing?

She was too old for Dani, too cynical and had defiantly to much ectoplasm on her hands to have any right to touch Dani. She was a ghost hunter for god sake! It may not be a problem now that they were young and reckless, but what about later? What about in five years?

Valerie had no idea what she would be doing by then. Would she still be a dirty five job nothing, using all her spare time on hunting ghosts till she collapsed four in the morning?

What the hell could she possible offer Dani or anyone? The little half-ghost might take a likening to her now, but unlike the others, Dani knew almost nothing about her. She didn’t know the shallow, self-centered, uncaring person Valerie had prided herself of being just two years back.

She had even threatened Dani in the past and until recently treated Danny just as any other ghost crossing her path. She had killed ghosts. She had hurt people. She had hurt her friends.

What could Valerie Ann Grey possible offer anyone?

“Some people want it all. But I don't want nothing at all!
If it ain't you, baby! If I ain't got you, baby!
Some people want diamond rings! Some just want everything!

But everything means nothing! If I ain't got you, yeah!"

Valerie froze when Dani leaned her head against her chest and pressed closer to her in the process. The huntress misstep only lasted a second before she continued dancing slowly, now with a smaller frame snuggling against her.

Valerie allowed herself to forget her doubts and pressed her face to the little half-ghost's soft hair. It smelled like kiwi and mango shampoo.

"If I ain't got you with me, baby.
So nothing in this whole wide world don't mean a thing.
If I ain't got you with me, baby."

Unknown to the two girls, Arianna had caught sight of them over Vlad's shoulder and smiled content, "hey, Vlad."

"Hmm," he hummed, lost to the song and his wife's embrace.

"You remembered that Valerie was the one catching my bouquet earlier, right?" she said, turned them a little, so the man could see for himself, "if you ask me, the wedding bells is ringing again."

The male halfa's eyes widened when Dani stood on her toes and pressed her lips to the surprised, but not unwilling huntress, cupping the other's cheek.

"Danielle!"

Both girls were startled and looked up to the sight of a furious Vlad marched their way, while being slowed down by his wife's grip around his arm and the heels she digged into the floor, "run Val! Run!"

Both girls got the message and ran for the exit.

“Danielle Masters, you come back this *instant!*”

“Hahaha! Run for it, girls! You have my blessing!”

Dani grinned and grabbed Valerie before turning ghost in the empty foyer. Both flew out and into the cool night where none could get them, both laughing as the young and carefree girls they were.

They spend the rest of the night on the top of the gates to the closed Tivoli. Watching the stars together and watched the sun rise above the city.

Valerie promised to come visit her in Wisconsin.

Chapter 23

Notes for the Chapter:

> Just a little bonus - i'm going on a last-minute larp for a week and wont be able to post next friday - so here you go
> hope you like it

Danny tapped the pen against the paper. Letting his eyes run over the math equations and pieces he had finish already fifteen minutes ago.

He was still no shark when it came to math, but his grades had improved since he got more time to study and get into the stuff, so he wasn't afraid of failing his last exam.

Next to him, Tucker had already finished his paper half an hour ago and stared into nothing with a dreamy look. Possible fantasizing about the new PDA that would be released this summer or the time he would spend with Dora – or maybe both.

Danny had to say he was jealous. He already knew the plan for his summer before college.

Moving into the castle.

Vlad haven't joked when he said he would take Danny op on his end of the deal. Papers had arrived with the mail, telling Danny that his acceptance to a dorm room at the college had been canceled and his deposit will be refunded, since a Mr. V. Masters had paid all the expenses.

How nice of him.

Danny glanced over at Sam. She hadn't exactly been thrilled to find out he had made plans for their last summer vacation before college and would only get to spend one day with him after the graduation, before Vlad shipped him back to Wisconsin for good.

He had offered to spend the vacation with her at the castle, but stopped himself from finish that sentence, as her death glare had deepened. She had dismissed all his calls and pleas for forgiveness for over a week, but end up forgiving him in the end.

She was still pissed though and since he couldn't really tell her the real reasons why he had made the deal in the first place and sold his soul to the ghost devil, she kept him up to his promise of skyping every day with an iron fist.

Danny was just happy it hadn't ended up in a break up. *Phew*.

The only one that took the news with good will, was off course his father, but what was to be expected. His mother had been a whole other story, calling the billionaire to get to the bottom of it and ended up giving in anyway.

After all, Danny wouldn't have to get a side job that could take his focus or time of studying, since he would be living at the castle for free and be provided with healthy nutritious meals three times a day to keep his stamina up.

If that wasn't enough to convince a worried mother, the promise of an all paid tutor and computer equipment of the latest model, would do the trick.

Well played, Vlad. Well played.

Danny had a suspicion that his mother only gave in in the end, because Arianna called had her and promised to take care of her baby-boy.

Jazz had objected, but in the end, it was Danny's own decision and just like his friends, he couldn't tell her the exact reason behind the decision of moving in with the Masters and end up telling them it was to keep an eye on Vlad to protect Arianna and Dani.

That wouldn't be a complete lie and they bought it. Mostly.

The only one who shared his secret and knew about the whole Cube and its ghosts threat looming over their head, was the person in front of him.

Valerie's long hair shifted in the silent classroom and just like Sam, she was still focusing on her paper and solving the last-minute math pieces.

Even though everyone had taken her and Dani for an item already before the wedding, no one could be in doubt after. Vlad had been furious and sent his duplicates after them as they had run away from the party.

The duplicates had been accompanied (more forced than anything else) by Arianna's shades who had wanted to see the drama up close and possibly rescue the girls, should Vlad end up finding them.

All had seen the scene at the party and considered it just an overprotective fatherly behavior, but Danny knew part of it was due to Vlad's fear of the Cube.

In the end, both girls had returned to the hotel unharmed and Valerie had assured him that they hadn't encountered any ghosts, but she had been aware of the danger. She had just needed a last night with Dani, before everyone went back to the States and parted ways.

Dani would go with Arianna and Vlad to the castle in Wisconsin, while Valerie would return to Amity with Danny and the others.

Vlad had forbidden her to come near his premises, but both Danny and Valerie knew Arianna would keep a backdoor open for the huntress – the woman was a hopeless romantic when it concerned the teens.

Danny had talked with both her and Dani over the last three months and received a huge birthday present in April, when his parents had celebrated his eighteenth birthday, with his sister and friends.

Maddie and Danny had almost taken the delivery truck for a mistake, when the driver showed her the accompanying birthday card. The Masters had wished him happy eighteen and asked him to call when he received his gift.

The truck had contained a motorcycle fresh from the fabric and ready to take for a spin.

A brand-new BMW S1000RR, stark black with long green and white lines. The bike had shined like a million, but while his parents were impressed, Danny had had his doubts. It reeked of money and that was usual the cologne a certain fruitloop would spray-paint himself with.

Danny had left the others to admire the bike, while he called the infamous number on his phone (that was also paid by the man – dammit!) listed under the name 'Fruitloop'.

"Vlad Masters speaking."

"You can't buy me, fruitloop. Just because I'm forced to live with you, doesn't make me entitled to accept your creepy-ass be-my-son gifts. Take it back," Danny had sneered and Vlad had chucked in the other end.

"Oh, Daniel I'm afraid you're making a fool of yourself."

"I'm serous – if you don't take it back, I will personally sell it myself and use the money on glitter bombs – you will never be able to open a letter again without fearing a glitter infection. I'm not kidding, those things get in everywhere and the glitter stick around for years!"

Vlad hadn't replied, but called out to someone outside the phone. Danny had felt his eyes glow green, "don't ignore me when I'm threatening you, Vlad! Those are hard to coming up with on the spot and I'm making an effort here!"

"My apologies, son, but I have more important matters and there's someone here who would love to listen to your hopeless complains," Vlad had drawled like he was bored.

"Don't call me son!" Danny had yelled and almost got hearing damage in return, when Arianna greeted him on the phone.

"Happy birthday! Did you like the gift? Have you opened the truck?"

Danny had switched to the left ear, letting his speed healing take care of the opposite's possible ruptured ear drum, "yeah I opened it –"

"Did you like it?" she had asked excited, *"I don't know much about*

motorcycles, but the dealer said this one was the best in its class and elected as the best sports model. You should have your motorcycle license by now and it would be easy for you to use it for the small stretch between the castle and University when you move here. Dani choose the color and I had them design it after a Phantom theme – it even has a thermos-holder and room for a passenger to – I thought you could take Sam out for a spin."

Danny had gotten a sense of foreboding and shrank, "uhm…did you by any chance buy it with Vlad's money?"

"Would it really matter, Danny?" she had asked humored, *"no, I brought it with some money I had on an old account back in Denmark. Seems like money does grow if you don't touch them for a decade. My father wouldn't take them, so I thought they could come in to good use, if me and Dani used them on that bike we've planned to buy anyway – but you haven't answered my question, do you like it?"*

He did. It run like a dream and Sam had cried out in glee, when he took it for a fast ride down the road. Danny had felt her cling to him, shaking with laughter.

It turned out a little later that Vlad in the end had left his own creepy touch on the bike, when Danny made a portal in front of himself and drove it into the Ghost Zone and transformed to Phantom.

The bike had then started humming and changed to a white design along with him, unfolding ecto-running engines, that made the bike reach a speed that matched his own in ghost form.

The bike was now waiting for him outside the school and Danny glanced up to the blackboard where Mr. Lancer was sitting, waiting for the time to run out and assist the students that should need his attention during the exam.

"Those who's in denial and think themselves safe in saying they have passed the exam, can turn in their paper at my desk and wait for the rest in the cafeteria," the out of shape teacher announced and Danny rose along with Tucker, Kwan and Mickey. Mr. Lancer took their papers and made them sign a formula, before letting them out the door.

Both he and Tucker waved to Sam and Valerie, who waved back and returned to their math problems.

“There’s nothing like math that make me feel like stuffing myself with meatloaf,” Tucker yawned and Danny grinned.

“It's Tuesday, dude, that’s means vegetarian menu.”

“Not for the 1. gentleman of the dragon kingdom,” Tucker smirked and pulled out a lamb-sandwich from his backpack, “Dora even roasted it for me herself.”

They found their table at the cafeteria and settled down, both a little melancholy and dreamy.

Danny let his hand run over the letters they had carved into the surface of their cafeteria table and followed the lines of their names and crazy ideas. Alongside was the permanent ink that the A-lists had left: *Loser 4 life. Ghost-freaks. Bad-luck-Tuck. Goth-bitch.* And other oldies.

“I can’t believe this may the last time we sit here,” Danny said quietly and Tucker frowned.

“I know…we have been sitting at this table like…forever. It’s gonna be so weird not seeing you guys every day. Not hunting ghosts and hang out at the Nasty Bruger…I can’t imagine hanging out with other than you, Sam and Valerie.”

The two friends looked at each other, then looked around the almost empty school cafeteria. There was something unending about the place.

The long halls. The typical high school lockers. The “go ravens” banners all-around the building...

There wasn’t a single place or room they haven’t seen or known by heart. They had fought a ghost on practical every single square of Casper High and taken a beating from a bully at almost every corner.

This was the place they first became ghost fighters and the resident of so many adventures.

“I’m going to miss this horrible place,” Danny finally said and Tucker send him an understanding smile.

The geeks snapped out of their shared misery of sweet memories, when Danny suddenly opened his purple backpack and pulled out a wrapped present, “hey, I keep forgetting to give you this and don’t wanna risk forgetting to bring it at the graduation.”

Tucker took the little packet and scowled, “Dammit, dude, now I look like a total douche. How am I supposed to find you a graduation gift on such short notice?”

Danny snorted and pushed his shoulder, “just open it, okay?”

Tucker snickered and unwrapped the box. He took curious the little ghost invention into his hand and turned it in the light of the fluorescent lamps.

Danny pointed to the red button, “it’s the Fenton ghost-portal-generator. My dad made it years ago, but forgot all about it, when Jhonny13 stole it from our lab. I destroyed the one he stole, but found the old blueprint for it when I cleaned the lab. It can make a temporary portal into the Ghost Zone and back again. I thought it would make it easier for you to visit Dora, now that you’re leaving Amity and my parent’s ghost portal.”

Tucker looked lost at word, “dude…”

Danny happily welcomed the other into a hug and both grinned like idiots, “it’s perfect, thanks man – but how the hell am I going to stick that?”

“Just promise you’ll come visit me in fruitloop hell this summer,” Danny snorted and fist bumped with the geek, “but seriously, come see me, okay?”

“You got it – I bring Sam and Valerie, make sure Arianna is there to help her sneak past Vlad though.”

Danny could already see them fight with Plasmius and smirked, but then turned solemn, “listen, Tucker…I’ve just realize I never asked how you felt about it.”

The geek crocked an eyebrow, “about Dani and Valerie dating?”

“No, me and Sam,” Danny stated, rubbing his neck, “we kind of just jumped into it back there. I never really got to check if you were okay with it. Looking back, we kind of ditched you for a period. Kinda lame of us.”

Danny found a hand on his shoulder and Tucker gave him a reassuring look, “nah, I totally get that you two needed some space. I know that the bro-code says you can’t let your bros date the girl in the gang, because that’s like dating a dude, but I have kinda shipped you two since freshman year, so yeah, go for it, man. I support you one hundred percent.”

Danny retuned his smile. Those words were far more appreciated than ay gift money could buy.

-

“Manson, Samantha.”

Sam rose from her seat and walked up to the podium with waving graduation gown to receive her diploma. Mr. Lancer handed it over with a sincere smile and the goth blushed under her parents over enthusiastic cries and applause, “guys, you’re embarrassing me!”

Danny, Valerie and Tucker was no better, standing and capping louder than anyone else combined, with big goofy grins, “whuuuuu! Go Sam!”

Sam flipped the bird at them and Danny kissed her cheek when she passed him and returned to her seat after an anabatic standard, which made Danny sit up front with Valerie and Tucker. Tucker had received his diploma just two minutes ago along with Valerie.

One could only assume that something had gone horrible wrong with the alphabetical order they were to be called to the podium in and Danny waited impatiently for them to get a grip on the list again and call his name.

“Turner, Nathan.”

“Chén, Kwan.”

“Miller, Star.”

“Thomas, Sarah.”

“Evans, Tiffanie.”

“Taylor, Mia.”

“Hall, Jasper.”

“Carter, Dale.”

“Anderson, Mickey.”

“Lopez, Paulina.”

“Fenton, Daniel”

Danny almost missed his own name and rose with shaking legs.

Tucker and Valerie gave him thumbs up, as he moved past their seats a little nausea and trembling. As he moved to greet Mr. Lancer on the podium, Danny couldn’t keep a sigh of relief from leaving his system.

There had been a time where he had been certain that he would never get to graduate.

That he would have to sit with the parents and family member and watch his friends get their diploma and ticket out of High School, while he would have to repeat a year due to failed exams and low grades.

The thought almost seemed silly now as he took Mr. Lancers hand and received the paper that meant he had done what his past self would have thought impossible.

The teacher gave him a genuinely smile and almost seemed proud, “congratulation, Fenton. I knew you had it in you.”

“Thanks, Mr. Lancer,” Danny retorted happily and turned to the rest of the sports hall. His dad was openly crying of joy, while his mother

was trying to film Danny, get his attention and comfort her husband at the same time.

Jazz called his name over the applause and her face shone with pride. Danny blushed, he might haven't got the highest score or aced every exam like her, but just that fact that she was proud of him and his achievements meant the world to him.

His heart skipped a beat, when his eyes wandered over the crowed and found midnight blue. Vlad Masters smirked with the confidence of a ruler and nodded pleased to the teen.

Next to him was Arianna on the edge of her chair, cheering his name and waving to him. He waved back and found Dani in between the two grown halfas, looking like she was bored, but happy for him.

Jazz seemed to have found them to and poked their parents to make them aware of the other's presence.

Danny left the podium and returned to the others, poking Valerie, "Dani is here."

The huntress searched the crowed and waved enthusiastic. Danny snorted when he caught sight of Vlad's annoyed scowl and Arianna's suppressed laughter.

The last Casper high student of year 2007 got his diploma and everyone quieted down, as Principal Ishiyama took the podium and smiled.

"Good Evening Honored Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen, student of Casper high and now graduated young people. A graduation ceremony is always such a special occasion – the culmination of years of hard work; the actualization of goals attained and the acknowledgement of successes achieved. So, it is only fitting that tonight we commemorate the road that we have all traveled together these last few years…"

Tucker tapped his PDA and snorted, showing Danny the screen, "I told you she would just copy a speech of the internet – you all owe me five bucks."

The students groaned quietly down the rows and pulled out their purses. The money traveled hands and ended up in the geeks pockets, “sweet!”

The Asian-American principal didn’t notice the commotion in the rows and finished her copied speech, “…may your years ahead continue to be characterized by empathy, compassion, objectivity and a willingness to take risks. May you always lead by example and work hard and play straight. May your successes be many and your tribulations be few and far between. We wish you everything that you so richly deserve in the years ahead – it has been an honor and a privilege watching your progress and success!”

The students rolled their eyes, but applauded along with the rest of the hall. The principal handed over the place at the podium to Paulina, who smiled confident as always and found her speech notes.

Danny zoomed out of her talk about being a young grownup in the modern world and having fun while learning and going out making a difference – all that crap.

Instead his focus returned to the sight of his parents and the Masters, who seemed to have a nonverbal interaction based on gestures and Morse code (well, mostly his father was trying to communicate with Vlad, who looked like he was having a hard time ignoring the man, since his wife insisted on him replying out of courtesy).

The commotion seemed to have drawn some attention to Vlad and the people around him and Arianna, started to stretch their neck and whispered curiously.

Some even took a picture of the billionaire mayor and his wife, who had been a media celebrity just a month earlier, due to the kidnapping scandal.

Vlad acted as nothing, while both Arianna and Dani looked like they were getting a little uncomfortable under all the unwanted attention.

Paulina soon finished her shallow speech and somehow declared all of them for graduated. Danny threw his hat along with the others and laughed with relief. They had graduated. They had made it.

They had survived Casper high.

Chapter 24

It was late night when Danny stepped up the familiar concrete steps and found himself outside his own front door…well in a few hours it would only be his parents front door, not his.

He was going to move. He winced by that thought.

The students had moved out to the fresh air after the graduation ceremony and taken the first steps of celebration. Parents had taken pictures, open champagne and mingled to congratulate other students and their families.

Danny had found his parents next to Sam and Tucker's and soon Mr. Grey had joined the group along with his daughter. The four students had proudly stood for a couple of pictures and posed with wide smiles and showed of their diplomas and gowns.

The fun had been spoiled when Vlad had walked up to them, but Danny had softened a little when Arianna hugged him and Dani jumped into Valerie's arms. Vlad had parted them fast and draw a line on the ground, "don't cross it or else!"

"Vlad that is highly inappropriate parenting," Jazz had accused and got a scowl from the man.

"She's a minor, Jasmine. My daughter isn't going to form that kind of relationship before she's a responsible adolescent – which means twenty."

Jazz had huffed and pulled out her arsenal of psychology books, starting a heated discussion on right parenting with the stubborn male. Arianna had just rolled her eyes and smeared out the line with her stiletto.

Maddie had then stepped up as the responsible adult and invited the grownups to Fenton works for coffee, while the teens took off to their graduation party.

Dani had wanted to go with Danny and the others, but Vlad had

taken a solid grip in her arm and dragged her with him and Arianna to the limo, “not on my watch, young lady.”

“See you tonight, Danny!” Arianna shouted from the limo and Danny had felt a knot starting to work up in his guts, as he jumped into Sam car together with Tucker and Valerie.

“They shouldn’t have visit before tomorrow,” he had said unsure and Tucker had smiled relax.

“They’re probably just a little early due to the graduation and all that. Surely, they just crashed at some hotel and stays for the weekend, before going back to Wisconsin with you and your stuff. Relax, man.”

Danny had tried.

They had arrived at Nathan’s house and joined the rest of the students for a party only free reckless teen could throw and Danny had allowed himself to fall back into the feeling and experience of being a normal teen, with normal drifts and normal simple joys.

The night was over before Danny even knew and he had taken the duty of driving them all home, since he was the only one still standing, sober as he was due to ghost biology and its fast burning of alcohol.

“See you tomorrow!” Tucker had slurred and stumble to his house, like someone in a storm at sea. Danny had waited untill he was sure his bro was safe indoor, before driving to Valerie’s home, where her father seemed to wait up for her. One window fully lighted.

“I come around tomorrow to hang out with you and Dani,” she had said and hugged both him and Sam goodnight, a little safer on her feet than the geek.

Sam had stretched in her seat and put her boots on the windshield as they had left the driveway, “sucks that we won’t get to spend the summer together – you sure you can’t stay?”

“Positive – but not in the good way,” he retorted, “Tucker and Valerie has promised to come visiting me in fruitloop hell, you’re coming

with them?"

"Sure. Just promise me that you tell me what's going on in that creepy castle, don't keep things for me if it gets out of hand. Phantom team, Ghost getters…whatever we name it. We still look out for each other. Don't do stupid things without me."

Danny snorted, "deal. No secrets…" *only that I sold my soul for info – guess what? The Cube is out for us all and they want my head on a stick! A stick, Sam. A STICK!?*

"…got it."

He parked her car in the house garage and turned off the engine. The darkness settled over them and he became aware of her perfume.

It wasn't one of those expensive one from some European company, neither one of those that tested their product on animals – god forbid Sam Manson would let that stuff get on meter near her exposed skin – but it had a sweet tone to it, almost frees like cut fruit or flower petals.

Something natural.

Sam's heat radiated in the night and little drops of sweat prickled her cleavage, possible from the warm night and dancing at Nathans. Even as she sat there, drunk and tousled at one in the morning, she had never looked more stunning in his eyes.

He caught her purple eyes and the natural attraction drew them together.

Danny could taste the liquor on her lips and reveled in the cocktail that was Sam Manson. Her skin and warm hair smelled like summer and sex, making arousal thump through his veins and her back twitched within his grip as it got rougher.

"I've never done it in a car," she whispered husky, gripping his growing arousal and started massage him through his jeans.

Danny made a low groan, lost to the feeling and admired her frame with his cool hands, as they wandered down her spine and cupped

her breast trough the light material of her short dress. Making her shudder with ecstasy.

“Sam…you’re drunk,” he whispered, but with humor in his low voice, “don’t wanna take advantage of y –”

“Oh, shut up, Mr. Nice Guy,” she sneakered and deepened the kiss, shutting him up effectively.

The little sounds that left the goth, made Danny hard instant and he gripped her hips.

She had positioned herself into his lap and started a slow pace, rocking against him and pressed their abdomens together, her warm thighs and stomach against his in a close embrace, that drove the teen mad, “Sam…”

“Sammikins? You home?”

Sam rested her head on his shoulder with a low groan, “fucking cockblock, mom.”

Danny snickered and phased out of the seat and settle beside her, “I'll come back later, okay?”

She had nodded and shared one last kiss, before the sound of her mother’s clicking heels made Danny turn invisible and Sam hurried to collecting her messy hair and dress, “coming, mom!”

Danny had phased out of the garage and followed Sam and her mothers with his eyes, as they walked to the front door and into the house.

He waited to the light in her bedroom tuned on and waved to his girlfriend before going home to fake his own bedtime routine.

High on celebration and sex, Danny had all forgotten about Vlad and froze right before taking the doorknob.

“Right…”

He took a deep breath to cool his nerves and opened with his spare

key, a key he would have to ask his parents if he could keep or had to return to them.

What an idea.

The muttering sound of rattling china and grownup talk leaked out to the hallway and Danny put all his stealth to use, as he suppressed his ghost signature and hovered a millimeter over the floor, in attempt to reach the stair and his room without getting caught.

But there was no sneaking behind Maddie Fenton.

“Danny, sweety, you home?” she called and stuck her head out the door to the living room.

Danny descended to the floor quickly and turned around with a faked smile, “yep! Just got home – better go to bed, so tired – bye!”

“Oh, no you don’t, young man,” his mother corrected and dragged him to the living room, “Vlad and Arianna have waited up for your sake, come in and sit before you leave, hon.”

“Leave?” Danny asked baffled and was greeted by his dad and the Masters spread around the white couch and armchairs.

Vlad grinned like a shark, “Daniel, good to see you, son. The parties over I presume? Just in time to pack your bags.”

“My *what?*” Danny asked even more at ease, making Vlad’s smirk widened.

Arianna rose from the couch and greeted him with an apologetic hug, “sorry, Danny. Vlad have some business out of the town and he don’t like the idea of me and Dani taking the jet home alone, so you’ll have to come with us tonight.”

“So unfair,” Dani sulked annoyed from her seat on the couch, “I promised to hang out with Valerie and everything!”

“We'll invite her to Wisconsin, treasure,” the older female halfa promised and kissed her temple, “you can text her on the plane and see when she has time to come.”

“But!” Danny started and turned to his parents for help. Based off their determined, albeit happy countenances it became clear to him they wouldn’t be much help, “Jazz?”

“We send Jazzie-pants home so she could get back to study for her exams,” his father replied and pushed him to the staircase, “up you go, son! Pack your bags and call if you need help!”

Jack pulled his wife to him and both watched their son with melancholic looks, his dad dried a happy tear, “they’re growing up so fast, I can’t even…”

Danny walked to his room without much options and pressed up against the closed door. What now?

“’kay, think Fenton,” Danny whispered and look around for help.

He would have maybe twenty minutes before they came looking for him. Danny patted his pocket to get his phone and froze when he found nothing.

“Looking for this?” a smooth baritone asked amused and Danny turned around.

Plasmius smirked with the phone secure in his gloved hand and showed it teasingly to Danny just out of reach, “calling your little friends after midnight is highly inappropriate and would be considered rude after decent standard, my boy.”

“Screw you!” Danny replied and stepped forward, “we agreed that I would get a day to myself before going with you. That was the deal! Are you even *capable* of keeping a deal?”

Plasmius chuckled, unaffected by the teens obvious rage and leaned up against the desk, “well that’s a rather ironic question, badger. You were the one to slander to the young Miss. Grey, taken her in on information I specific forbid you to share and broke the part of the deal that should have been idiot-prove. So who’s incapable of keeping a deal here, hmm?”

Fuck. He had a point. Dammit!

“So what, the deals of? Is that what you’re saying?” Danny tried to hide it, but the hopeful tone shone through and made Vlad shook his head in amusement.

“Oh, no. But since you extended the deal by sharing confidential information, I took the liberty to get you and your belongings a day before we agreed. I’ll say we’re even now, wouldn’t you?”

Danny scowled, but wouldn’t give up just yet, “Valerie was an emergency, my dad was on the line and you didn’t even care! The deal is of, Fruitloop, I’m not going with you before tomorrow.”

Vlad’s red eye twitched, but he kept up the formal posture, “oh really? And disappoint our two ladies’ downstairs?”

Danny crossed his arms, making his answer clear to the halfa. Vlad’s smirk withered slowly and he rose from his relaxed position. Danny often forgot just how intimidating Plasmius could be with his height and wide frame that seemed to take up all the air in any room.

Danny stood his ground with his back pressed to the door nonetheless and tried hard not to show his growing apprehension, as Plasmius cast him in the shadow of his looming form.

“I have been patient with you, boy, but this is getting tiring. Either you be a good boy, pack your belongings and walked down to the door to take an honest, but short farewell with Jack and Maddie and leave with us on the plane to Wisconsin, or I will use this,” Vlad said slow and perilously, showing the teen a black remote.

Danny’s hand shoot instinctive to his throat to search for a slave-collar, but found nothing.

The second idea of what the remote could be connected to didn’t seem one bit better, to the teen, “Arianna said she removed the chip from her neck…”

Plasmius looked offended, “I would never dream of controlling my wife or daughter with such methods, Daniel, this remote isn’t for a collar or chip. It’s a remote that control bloodstreamed nanobots.”

A little lightbulb blinked in Danny mind and he remembered where

he had heard about those bots before.

Vlad had launched them into Jazz's body and forced her test out the upgrade the Ecto-Skeleton, he had stolen from Danny's father after he had removed its negative effects with the Fenton Ecto-Conveter and Technus' Lightning rod to.

Those nanobots was still in her blood.

Danny paled, "Jazz…"

"I would never hurt my family like this," Plasmius continued and turned the remove in his hand, "dear Jasmine on the other hand… can you imagine, Daniel? Sweet Jasmine on her way to her apartment in that car of her's and suddenly her blood runs slower, almost working against her own body. Slower and slower, till dizziness makes her eyesight blurry and nausea takes her focus of the road. I can't even begin to imagine –"

Danny jumped him and turned ghost the second before reaching for the remote, but the other had anticipated his move and slammed him against the door with a hand locked around his throat.

Squishing tightly.

"Ah ah ah, Daniel," Plasmius jeered and restored the remote back to his blood red tunic, "as much as I can see you dying to destroy that remote, it will have to wait till we're back at the castle. Can't let you take my security percussions from me now, can I?"

"You're sick!" Danny wheezed through his teeth and fell to his knees, as Plasmius released him and towered over him.

"Well?"

Danny regained his breathing capacity and tried getting a plan out of the floor cracks. He found nothing.

If he didn't leave with Vlad, his sister would suffer and in worst case die on the highroad. The man said he would get to destroy the remote as soon as they reached the castle, but there was no guarantee that he would keep that promise.

Still – did he have a choice? Danny couldn't let him leave with it either.

Danny rose to his feet without meeting Plasmius' eyes and turned human again. The teen pulled a large duffle back out from his closet without a word and started packing his life down one piece at a time.

Vlad watched him with a complacent smile, "good boy."

Danny gritted his teeth, but carried on with his packing, taking the old and new framed pictures on the nightstand and pulled out the content of his bedside chest and dresser.

The duffel bag hung heavy from his shoulder, but even if it contented all of his belongings, something told Danny that it was fare to light.

Vlad turned back to Masters and tapped his wristwatch, "alright, time to go, Badger."

Danny followed the man to the door like a shadow, but stopped with one hand on the doorframe. Giving the room a last glance. The blue room had been his bedroom and sanctuary for almost eighteen years and every corner seemed to bear unspoken words.

The old NASA posters and plastic stars on the celling that would light in the dark, had been a welcoming sight as far back as he could remember.

The silly rocket over his bed as well as the models on the shelves was made by his own hands and held a lot of old memories and childhood dreams.

It seemed to Danny that he had created something here that was so fundamentally to him, that is would be almost impossible to rebuild again elsewhere.

Would he ever get to feel at home again? Would this room still be here if he returned?

Vlad tapped his foot impatiently and Danny snapped out of his depressing thought, "right…"

His parents waited for him at the bottom of the staircase along with a sulking Dani and a patient Arianna, “all set, Danny?”

He nodded, not trusting his voice right now and welcomed his mother’s embrace, “oh, Danny I can’t believe you’re going to college. Without you and Jazz, it’s going to get so quieted here.”

Jack joined the hug, squishing his son and wife with tight love, “and I can’t believe we’ll finally get to build that ghost observing center on the first floor!”

Danny walked with Dani out the door, while the grownups made their farewell and watched as the longhaired ghost chauffeur opened the limo door for her and grinned at Danny, “you’re coming, ghost-boy?”

Danny gave the house a mental goodbye and climbed in with his clone. Fenton work’s neon light shone bright in the night and laid a soft light over his parents waving goodbyes, as the limo left the curbs.

Vlad and Arianna had settled in the seats in front of them to watched the two teens and shared a smile. Dani played on her phone while Danny stared out the window, trying to imprint the familiar sites.

The road to Fenton work…the arcade…the Nasty burger…Caspar High…Valerie’s apartment…Tucker’s house…Sam’s house.

Danny felt like something had twisted his guts.

The limo drove up to the town airport, where a private yet waited for them in the hangar and two men was filling it with fuel. The driver took Danny’s duffel bag and handed it to one of the workers, before settle into the cockpit, changing his cap to that of a pilot.

Vlad took Arianna by the arm and walked to the yet with a calm ease, while Danny took every step as was it his last. Dani jumped in after the pair and threw herself into one of the luxurious seats, still busy on her phone.

Danny took on of the window seats and tried to keep his depressing thought on a minimum. Arianna gave him an understanding look and

patted his shoulder before taken her seat next to Vlad. Danny appreciated it, but could only offer her half a smile.

The plane left the ground, but where he normally loved the feeling of flying and the little jump it would create in his stomach, Danny couldn't dwell in the feeling as he used to and closed in on himself.

Up in the air and bright night sky, Danny looked down on the little lights that was his home town and sighed silently.

"Goodbye Amity."

Chapter 25

Vlad woke up the next morning with a feeling of resurrection rushing though his finer mind threads.

He had done it. Daniel was here.

Vlad silent the alarm without waking his slumbering wife and pulled her closer with a satisfied sigh.

He had come up with the wonderful habit of setting his alarm to wake him an hour before time, so he would get an entire hour to remind himself every morning of what he had achieved.

Feel the weight of another warm body beside him and the sweet smell of her hair, the sun from the balcony had warmed up on the pillow.

On the corridor to their shared bedroom, he could faintly hear the sound of Danielle who turned in her own four-poster bed. A sweet rustling sound that had made itself a new constant in Vlad Masters life.

He welcomed it. Made it a part of his home.

When first created, Danielle had originally been sleeping with the other clones and lived shortly at his mountain chalet, hidden from the world and at hand to catch Daniel.

As a failed project, he hadn't thought much of her and simply expected to keep her until she had served her purpose and he could melt down her again. Amazing how things could change.

After the adoption had been approved and funded with the proper forms and a fake birth certificate, not to mention the handout of money under variously tables, Vlad had given his wife free rein to choose any guest room at the castle grounds to design at will.

Arianna had chosen a guest room on their hallway on their left hand and spent a few hours with a professional architect on the computer, to find the right materials and have them sent to Wisconsin, where

the servants would let the hired people in to do the work.

Vlad had seen the final result when Danielle was led to her new room after they returned from Denmark and had to admit it was stunning.

The colors were kept in white and light green, which gave it a neutral gender expression, yet still on the feminine side, with the many fluffy pillows and leaf vine motifs.

The small hybrid had thrown herself on the four-posted bed, clearly enchanted by the room she could call her own and both he and Arianna had watched her become more and more accustomed and comfortable with her new life in Wisconsin with them the last three months.

Vlad pushed his sensitive ghost hearing as the newest addition to his domain drew attention to himself.

Vlad had at one time had a room designed for the cloned son he had had under creation, but like the wardrobe and all the other things that had belonged to the project, he had disposed of it and thrown the drawings to the room away after the failure.

After his castle was turned to ruins for the third time he had strongly considered making one of the guestrooms at his hallway larger and end up in carrying out it – though not without making the room across a similar size, so it wouldn’t’ seem suspicious.

It had paid off now that he had not only Daniel, but Danielle with him. The boy's unexpected, but not unwelcome offer to live with them had brought the man a little out of focus and made him forget to ask Arianna to personalize another room.

Daniel had not said a word the entire trip to Wisconsin and slammed the door as Vlad assigned him to the guestroom on the right side of the hallway.

It was obvious that Daniel wouldn’t adapt freely, but it meant nothing to the man. The most important was that the boy was here. That he had offered it voluntarily. He was here by his own free will.

Vlad pressed Arianna closer and she blinked drowsy, "Vlad? What

time is it?"

"04:30, love. I have four hours before the meeting in New York."

She snuggled in to him and sighed with a smile, "do you want pancakes or omelet?"

He kissed the crown of her hair and laid both arms around her, "I can get Temple to make breakfast, you don't have to get up, dear."

"I know, but Dani and I have had breakfast without you the last three months and I wish we could have meals as a family thing. Now that Danny's here to, we might as well do it right ... did you know that Danny always eats alone back home?"

He did. Vlad had too often turned on his spy cams and seen the boy eat microwave heated food alone in the Fenton kitchen, because of his parents' impossible working hours and sister study influenced routine.

If the boy didn't have to rush out of the door and even ate breakfast, it was in the form of Chinese take-away leftovers or an apple on the way to school. Far from an optimal eating routine or lifestyle for an unstable teenager.

It had always outraged Vlad. It was expected that a man like Jack Fenton would forget and neglect his children in favor of his own interests and spontaneous whims, but Maddie?<7p>

A woman responsible for two children and a man-child should at least see the need in gathering the family around something as fundamental as a shared meal after appropriate time slots and home cocked dishes.

But perhaps it shouldn't have come as much as a surprise to Vlad. When the three of them had been studying in college, he had been the one who cooked (and actually been good at it) if they hand't spend their money on takeout and pizza.

While Vlad had been responsible for cooking, Jack had been responsible for the purchase and Maddie had been responsible for looking after him, to make sure that he actually was shopping by

Vlad's list and not spending all their money on fudge and ham.

Maddie Fenton was perhaps perfect in every way, but her skills in the kitchen wasn't matching up with the picture. The same could appeared said about the case of her understanding of family values.

"I tell the kitchen to set the table for four."

The female hummed satisfied and Vlad checked his alarm one more time, she followed his eyes, "maybe breakfast isn't the only thing you got time for."

Vlad chuckled. Another reason to set the alarm an hour before.

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"Daniel."

Danny ignored the voice. He was far too comfortable to even get to the crazy idea of moving and relished in his little nest of soft comforters, pillows that must have been stuffed by angels and the mattress that only could be described as heavenly.

Not even a pressed bladder, growling stomach or activated ghost sense could get him out of this warm nest.

"Daniel."

Get a hint, Danny thought and turned over so he had his back to the interloper. All his semi-conscious senses told him that it was still dark outside and way too early for him to get up.

The early cars haven't even started to drive pas his window, geez.

Wait…Danny's ghost hearing sharpened. Where were the traffic?

Other more disturbing information slowly made it to his mind. This bed was comfortable in a way his own dented and abused bedsprings could never even begin to match and the bedsheet smelled strange, but not in a bad way, just…unfamiliar.

An unknown sent of a detergent with lime tone. Smelled expensive.

The lack of traffic was soon replaced with the sound of the wind in the treetops and far away he faintly heard the call of a cow. Little birds chirping outside his window, which just got the little red light to flash even more alarming in his drowsy mind.

No bird with a sane mind would get near the grounds of Fenton Work. The annual flashes and explosions usual kept all living beings one miles away from his house and if that didn't scare them away, the many traps and lures around the place would get them.

The traps were original meant for ghosts, but apparently worked on rats, squirrels, crows and the paperboy to. (Last one had been intelligent enough to avoid the house after that.)

Danny couldn't blame them, he had taken his turns with his own traps and inventions, just inside the house, which brought him to the next big ringing alarm. He couldn't hear his mother rattle around the toilet or his dad's steady snore, only adaption could make you sleep though.

All of those facts made his body stiff and all senses alert with sharp clearness. This wasn't his bed, his room, his house or safety zone. And the one calling him…

Wait was that just a cow mooing just now?

"Daniel, wake up, boy."

His eyes shot open like pulled window blinds, meeting the sight of none other than Vlad Masters looming form.

"ARRRGG!" the teen shrieked and felt gravity taking control of him, as he fell out of bed. The man rose an eyebrow, "charming way of greeting others in the morning, Badger, but a simple 'good morning' would have been preferred."

Danny scrambled to his feet and scowled, "what the hell!? Have you been watching me sleep, you creep?"

Vlad sighed and pulled the curtains to let the early sun in the dark room, making Danny squint with a groan.

“Really, Daniel? As a person living under my roof, one would assume that you would be more grateful for being waken up along with the rest of the house.”

Danny’s brain started working fast. The many images and happenings from yesterday, or rather the night's events, played quickly over his inner retina and answered all his questions at once. He had left Sam’s place.

Vlad had turned the tables and forced his parents to let him go one day before time. Danny had stood his ground. Vlad had threatened Jazz. Jazz…

“…the remote.”

Vlad turned his head to watch him out of the corner of his eye and pulled the remote from his breast pocket. Danny reached to snatch it, but Vlad was faster and held his eyes.

“Breakfast will be held in the dining hall on the main floor in precisely half an hour. I expect you to be there and dine with us, as well as the rest of the meals from now on. No excuses.”

He gave Danny the remote with a last stern look and Danny crushed the device with a controlled ecto-ray in his hand, matching the man’s glare. Vlad smirked by that and walked to the door, “your bathroom is on your left, freshen up, my boy, can’t waste time.”

Danny waited until the door was closed, before he turned to the phone on the nightstand and unlocked it to check if Tucker or Sam had seen any of his messages. His eyebrow skyrocket when the display showed him the time.

“Five thirty!? Who the hell is up at five thirty!?”

Vlad didn’t respond to his cries, but a cheery whistle could faintly bee heard down the corridor.

Danny groaned and considered strongly to demonstrate just how little authority a fruitloop’s words had on a grown teenager and just throw himself back to bed and get up at ten o'clock like every other sane person.

But something told him it wouldn't be worth it. Vlad had specific said 'us' and not 'I'. Arianna and Dani would probably want to see him at the table and if he had to be honest, he was starving.

The bathroom was like the one Danny remembered from his visit at the reunion, but little changes like the size and new design, reminded the teen that this wasn't' the same castle he had visit back then.

What was this? The third, fourth castle? Why the man even insisted on living in a castle to begin with went over his head. Danny watched himself in the mirror after a quick use of the fancy toilet and splash some water on his face.

He could do this.

His dark eye circles and spiky hair told a different story, but he ignored it and checked his phone. 04:37. Enough time to take a bath.

Danny stripped down the old t-shirt and boxers, and chose the shower over the bath tub. The last one was almost twice the size of a freaking jacuzzi and would probably take him an hour to fill.

Danny soon realized he haven't exactly brought any toiletries with him and started to search the cabins for something to use. He crocked his head by the sight of a toothbrush still in its plastic wrapping and matching toothpaste.

Brand new things like an electric razor stood side by side with three different kinds of brushes and combs, hair gel and mouthwash with taste of mint. The complete starter kit for the ill-fated toilet visitors.

Danny got the weird feeling that this was brought specific for him, but brushed it off as the places overall weirdness. If he took a look in one of the other guestroom he would probably find the same stuff in those bathrooms.

Nothing special.

Danny turned on the showerhead and picked the least smelling shampoo on the shelf, not feeling confident enough to face the world and his new existence smelling like a tropical rainforest in spring or a flower shop in France.

He snorted when he found a note on how to use shampoo and conditioner correctly, and used the shampoo as he always had. Letting the rest of the shelf stay untouched. As he worked the stuff into his hair Danny used the peace and privacy to think his situation over.

He was far from home, friends and common grounds and to his own dread and defeat, he had only himself to blame for this. Danny was starting to think the deal wouldn't be worth it, but stopped himself from spilling down that path.

Keeping his mentor and cousin safe would never not be worth any dread he would have to endure and he rested in the thought that he had done the right thing no matter the price.

If keeping the two female halfas alive and happy meant he had to live with Vlad the next couple of years, so be it.

The more time Danny spent under the four showerheads (yes, four! One of those multi shower systems you only see on MTV, when some star showed you his crib) the more at ease he became. He wouldn't be living only with Vlad.

He wasn't some prisoner. He would have college, free range and could go where he wanted. If he was clever he would only have to see Vlad at the meals and avoid him for the rest of the day's twenty-four hours. Piece of fudge cake.

And speaking of fudge.

Danny felt his stomach growl and stepped out of the shower to dry off and get his cloths. He settled with a pair of black jeans, his outworn sneaker and threw a red hoody over a white shirt with his Phantom sign on the chest.

Sam had given it to him and made him wear it for the ironic purpose.

His parents haven't exactly been ecstatic to see their son wearing their enemies signature around the house, but none of the had seen any reassembles between him and the ghost-boy either, so Danny had ignored them.

Sometime his parents were so stupid, it actually hurt. He instantly felt bad for thinking about them like that and promised himself to call them first thing after breakfast.

They would be up before his friends, who would surely be staying in bed for at least five more hours with those hangover cases they were doomed to suffer. It didn't exactly help that it was Saturday either. Who the hell woke up before the sun on a Saturday?

Apparently, fruit-freaking-loops did.

Danny peered out the door to make sure he was alone and started walking down the corridor without a single feeling of direction.

Even if this had been the same castle he had walked back at the reunion, he would had been just as lost, but he remembered faintly that the man had said something about the main floor and phased through the green carpet.

Danny shoot south and ended up at the foyer and rolled his eyes. No matter how many times this place got turned into ruins those stupid Packer trophies always seemed to survive.

The green and golden walls and rugs covered the room completely and two golden stairways with a green wooden door between them lead upstairs to the unknown floor Danny had passed on his way down.

The enormous portrait of the Wisconsin dairy king had been removed though and Danny stared at the empty space where a frame should have been. Maybe it had been send to repair? Danny knew nothing of paintings and could only guess.

Danny looked around the displays of Green Packer paraphernalia and decided that the door between the stairwell could be the entrance to the dining room.

His guess turned out to be right and a large room with warm colors and wooden décor greeted him along with a long dining room table that could easily host an army.

A chandelier lighted the room with a soft glow and was caught in the

silverware and utensils that was set on the east end of the table.

Danny froze in his steppes, when he realized Vlad was the only one occupying a chair, busy reading a newspaper and immersed in what might be the sports pages and stock market.

Danny was ready to sneak out and wait for the others to arrive, but there was no chance in hell with the others halfa's ghost hearing.

"Don't be rude, Daniel. Sit down."

Danny sighed and took the chair farthest from the man, "where's the others?"

Vlad chuckled without taking his eyes of the paper, "patients is a gentleman's trademark, my boy. The ladies still have five minutes' left, but as a gentleman, we're obliged to give a lady as much time as she needs."

Danny muttered something incomprehensible under his breath and leaned his tired head on his hand. Next time he would stretch it to the last minute before coming to eat and peered to the doors on the opposite side of the table.

They were white double doors framed by two large houseplants, looking exactly like the pair Danny had just entered, just closed and not wide open. His curiosity was killed, when the doors opened and a little ancient looking ghost walked out of them heading for the table.

The ghost's eyes were covered by big heavy eyebrow and the little hair on his head was brushed to cover his obvious baldness and liver spots, making him the oldest looking ghost Danny had ever seen.

The little ghost nodded humbly to Vlad and straightened his formal butler uniform, complete with white gloves and golden watch in hanging chain.

"Morning, sir. Do you wish to dine or wait for the ladies?"

"We'll will be waiting for them, Jerome. Tell the kitchen that this will be procedure from now on," Vlad replied and gave the ghost his paper. The butler turned to Danny, "and what would the young man

wish to eat?"

"Erhhh," Danny replied uncertain and tried to come up with a satisfying answer, "uhmm, fruitloops?"

The humor fell on deaf ears and Vlad send him an unamused look, "he will have what I have."

"Hey!" Danny objected, but the butler was already on his way back to the doors and possible kitchen, ignoring him completely. Danny huffed and returned to his sulking, "forgot you only keep dead company around here. What happened? The living ones found out this place was haunted?"

"You make it sound like an adverse thing, my boy," Vlad said and folded his hands over his crossed legs, "I think you will come to see that having ghosts instead of human servants have its advantage.

They move more freely, doesn't faint when you phase though walls and you won't have to keep your ghost-half a secret for them. Quite handy, if I should say so myself." Danny just rolled his eyes in lack of a better comeback.

The man had a point, but there was no way Danny would admit that.

The civilized banter with Vlad felt good though. Danny couldn't say he had missed fighting his nemesis, but the little biting wordplays and poking the man's person had been a huge part of his half-ghost life and in some way, he felt neglected without.

Not that he would ever admit that either, the older halfa was already thinking to highly of himself and didn't need to know just how much space he filled in Danny's life.

The soft sound of stiletto heels and flat designer sneakers made them aware they'd got company and Arianna walked in with a chatting Dani by her side. Danny watched on edge as the Masters family scene unfolded before him.

Vlad rose to greet the females, kissing his wife and catching Dani when she jumped him for a hug. The last surprised Danny. Didn't Dani hate Vlad? The adoring smile she sent Vlad and the attentive

face of the man spoke otherwise and Danny frowned.

“Morning, Danny,” Arianna smiled and kissed the crown of his head, before taken the seat next to him, ending up on Vlad’s left side.

“It’s not morning before ten, this is torture,” Dani yawned and bro-fisted him before taken the seat opposite of him and Arianna. Ending up on Vlad’s right side.

“I know right?” Danny grinned, trying to work the awkwardness of and act as if they haven’t just showered his archenemy with love.

What the actual hell?

The butler Jerome returned with a maid and a serving card, where four silver serving-bells, coffee, juice and a glass pitcher with milk balanced. Danny recognized the little ghost maid and by the looks of her scowl, she recognized him to.

The serving-bells got divided and their content revealed. Arianna’s plate turned out to be French toast with fresh cut fruit, while Dani’s was pancakes with butter, syrup and bacon crumble.

‘Have what Vlad is having’ tuned out to be a sunny side eggs, crispy bacon and toast, which turned out to be way better than any of the other possibilities Danny had imagine Vlad would consume in the morning. The souls of the innocent as an option.

Danny ignored the toast.

“You slept well?” Arianna ask him as they started to dig in and Vlad chuckled over the rim of his cup of coffee.

“Well enough to ignore me call on him three times, I guess we will have to wake our little badger here up an hour before, to give him some extra time to snooze, just like Danielle.”

Danny felt his ears burn. So Vlad were answering for him and taking about him like he wasn’t even there now? He would have to get the man back on this later – wait…when did Danny became *our* little badger?

“Hey! I’m technical only four in human years,” Dani defended herself, cutting her pancakes with the same grace as a lumberjack, “I have right to twelve hours sleep at least! It’s proven by science.”

“Then we’ll have to withdraw your free time for the benefit of your private lessons, then” Arianna smiled, “twelve hours’ sleep will at least take up two hours of your video games.”

Dani bit her fork with a regretful grimace, “you know what? Eight hours is perfect for a ghost at sixteen, no need to change that. Pretty sure its proven scientific to.”

Both Vlad and Arianna laughed by her antics and finished their breakfast in time for the maid to return with a tray. Danny stared as a tall glass of something looking suspiciously like ectoplasm was placed in front of him, “what the hell is that?”

“Dad’s power smoothie,” Dani answered without any concerns and drowned her own glass. Danny could only stare at her. Did she just call Vlad ‘dad’?

Danny eyed the green “smoothie” with suspicion and wrinkled his nose with disgust. It even smelled like freshly spilled ectoplasm…

“It’s a concentrate of ecto-based vitamins and nutrition, nothing dangerous,” Vlad reassured him without much success. Danny watched as Arianna received her own glass and was handed a small cup of pills from the maid to wash down with it.

Danny was on the edge of alarm, “what are those?”

Arianna started giggle by the sight of his incredulous glare, “it’s just fertilizing pills to help me get pregnant, Danny. As Vlad said, nothing dangerous.”

Okay, Danny had it with this. He pushed his glass away and crossed his arms, making it clear he wasn’t taking the man’s creepy potion. Vlad just sighed and made a gesture to the maid to take his untouched glass away.

The little ghost sent Danny a last dead threat with her toxic green eyes, before rolling the serving card along with her back to the

kitchen.

“Good luck with the deal in New York,” Arianna said and kissed her husband goodbye, as the butler retuned with Vlad’s coat and briefcase.

“Ugh! Get a room,” Dani sneered in disgust, but it sounded more like the mandatory teen reply of seeing her parents smooching than anything else and Danny scowled.

“I’m just gonna go for a walk now and find a place to barfing.”

Dani ran with him and the older teen waited for them to be out of hearing range before confronting her, “Dani what the hell?”

Dani blinked confused, “what?”

“When did Vlad become ‘dad’? When did you start hugging him? What’s with the whole blindly stuffing yourself with everything he sets on your plate? What happened!?”

Dani winced by his accusing words and bit her lower lip with something that could be mistaken for guilt.

She looked at anything than him, “it’s…it’s kind of complicated, Danny…you wouldn’t understand.”

“Try me,” he said and made her squirm. An angry edge soon crossed her face and she returned his glare, “screw you, I don’t have to explain anything to you or anyone else. So what if I call him dad? So what? Who cares!”

“I Do!”

“No you don’t! If you really cared you wouldn’t try taking this from me,” she sneered and crossed her arms dismissive, “you get to be all high and mighty ‘cause you got your own parents. It’s always been like that – don’t you think I want something like a family for my own? Having a home and being someone’s kid? You can judge all you want, but they’re my parents now, Danny. I can call them mom and dad all I want and you know why? Because they call me their daughter to. Deal with it!”

Dani pushed him aside with a punch of her shoulder and ran off. Danny could only stare dumbfounded after her. A lump forming in his chest.

Arianna walked out from the foyer and found him in the parlor, “hey Danny, have you seen Dani?”

Danny’s eyes darted to the door Dani had run though with tears forming in her eyes, but didn’t feel like getting deeper into this right now and confront this new area of things he didn’t wanna dwell on.

“…not really.”

“She’s probably around here somewhere, no use trying to hunt her down in this castle, she’s pretty good at hide-and-seek. Now I have you, what about we go look at your room?”

“My room?” he asked puzzled and she nodded.

“Yeah, I like to look for furniture and wallpaper with you. I have a couple of workers coming over in an hour.”

Danny frowned, “why? I’m fine with the guestroom.”

“But you’re not a guest here, Danny,” she smiled wryly and took his arm to lead him to his room, “you’re one of us, you’re family.”

The lump in his chest tightened.

Chapter 26

Sam's eyes widened and she leaned in to the webcam screen, *"and they just ate it? Just like that? But what if it's something mind controlling, or hormonal, or ghost magic!? Nutrition and vitamins my ass!"*

Tucker's part of the skype screen stuck out his tongue, *"promise you don't drink it, dude. Can't lose you to Vlad-land to. You're sure those pills were only for pregnancy acceleration? What did they look like?"*

Danny leaned back in his super comfy desk chair, spinning around and tried recalling the content of the little glass in Arianna's hand.

"I don't know, white? Round? Vitamin looking?"

"Even if they're really just for pregnancy, it's still sick!" Sam sneered and sent her organic water bottle flying of her bed with a fist slammed down into the sheets, *"he's drugging her up like some broodmare – a freaking breeder! He's like the modern psycho version of old time lords who just used women for heir. Danny you have to stop this!"*

Danny buried his head in his hands and groaned. What did they think he'd been doing? The last two weeks had been one disturbing discovery after another for the poor teen and Danny felt like his nerves were showing. Thin and shredded.

Dani still wasn't talking to him and would use all means to avoid him in creative ways. Her schedule was impossible to get behind and when he finally saw her, she would get behind Vlad or Arianna, ignore him completely or run of to her 'private lessons'.

A seven hours' span of time Danny wasn't allowed to interfere with, or knew the exact location of. Hell, he couldn't even find the dining room without taking shortcuts to the foyer.

Getting to Dani without apologizing or tie her up, was out of question and Danny had told himself to wait for her to run tired and come to him. She would grow tired of this and see how fucked up it all was and return to his side…right?

It was clear that Vlad had taken advantage of the little ghost girls whish for family bounds and sneaked into her image of a father, with that manipulate influence of Arianna as a mean. If Danny was a fatherless orphaned, he would probably had fallen for it to.

Dani didn't have a father like Jack to compared with and be reasonable enough see behind Vlad's deception. Danny loathed the man for it. Wasn't it enough that he had hurt her before and even attempted to straight up murder her?

Now he had to play with her heart to?

Danny had to get her out of Vlad's claws and make her see clearly without the Plasmius fog to cloud her eyes, but the only way to move Dani would be by moving Arianna. And she was a whole other case. A lost case.

Danny had followed the sound of battle the other night and found Arianna and Vlad in one of the living rooms.

They had shoot ghost rays after each other and yelled on the top of their lounges, but in Danish, which made it impossible for Danny to get a single understanding word out of their banter.

But Danny had understood the language of fist fighting and made ready to join his mentor – and then stopped himself. He had watched in confusion as Nightshade had thrown Plasmius through the room, without as much as a kick in return from the male.

Vlad had made no real effort to throw her off him either and instead just pulled her closer. Suddenly Danny found himself witnessing what had started out as a violent fight, turning into a very violent slash passionate makeout session.

Danny had backed out of the room without a sound or let his presence known to the two passionate halfas, heading straight to the kitchen to find some bleach to clean his eyeballs with and erase the image of those two ripping each other's cloths to sheds.

Curse ghostly speed healing.

There really was no way of curing the woman from the contagious

fruitloop epidemic, but at least she had come in handy several times when Danny crossed path with the man and got the young adult out of trouble.

She might be bound to the man, but she kept an equal leash around his junk. Making him behave when he lost his patents with the teen.

She was still a lost course, but Danny would honor her memory. That and her ghost training.

Danny had got back to their training routine and would spar with her shades and continued develop his powers under her supervision for a couple of hours a day, when Vlad left for work in the morning after breakfast and Dani would go to her lessons.

Despite it all, he had to admit the new facility and undisturbed routine was better. The giant training simulations room Vlad had built into his castle hidden under the ground was impressive.

The white room would spite out guns, laser and hologram scenarios by the click of a button in the control room and even keep track of one's training development and ad higher levels.

Vlad would sometimes watch them train when he returned earlier from the office than expected. Danny had seen him watch from the control room and ignored him completely. Trying to get as much out of Nightshades training as possible.

Danny knew she and Dani would have their own training when Dani finished her lessons at five, but he hadn't gotten the chance to watch them, since Vlad usual had retuned back to the castle by then and forced the teen to join him at the library or his study.

Apparently, Vlad wanted some 'bonding time' with him, much to Danny's dismay. It would usual start with Vlad picking any topic coming to his mind and end up in a quarrel between them.

Danny found it meaningless, but the fruitloop was persistent, probably thinking he could win the teen over by spending quality time with him.

Too bad, with no luck in the female's department, Danny would get

his frustration out on the man by pointing out his flaws, teasing him about his cat (It's Danielle and Arianna's cat, Daniel!) and little sore spots the teen had learned about through their previous fights.

As a connecting thread to wrap up the whole affair, every morning would start with Danny refusing the tall glass of Vlad's ecto-concentrate smoothie and end with Danny slamming his door and give his friends a full report about his daily deeds on skype.

If Vlad's annoying attempts, Dani cold shoulder and Arianna's ignorance wasn't enough to deal with, there was the servants.

Not "linking" him was an understatement. He still couldn't leave the house without risking ghost excrement falling down on him or meet a servant in a hallway, without getting the death stare. Despite Arianna's talk of "feel at home", Danny had never felt further from it.

His frustration and pined up anger had finally cracked him and Danny still couldn't believe himself. He sighed and stopped spinning to look at his two beat friends on the screen.

"I'm going to do something about this, but listen…about the second day I got there…" Danny began and received his two friends fully attention…

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…Vlad had called Danny to him the second morning in the Masters resident and forced Danny to greet the castles staff.

The five ghosts had not greeted him back, but Vlad seemed to have completely overlook that particular detail and continues the presentation.

"I like you to get to know the castle's staff, Daniel, this is the castle's butler and household steward, Jerome. He has served me for fifteen years and is his weight worth in gold, so to speak."

The old ghost nodded and straighten his uniform with a sense of pride, "thank you, sir."

"Then there's our talented chef, Mr. Temple, I think you meet him

and our young maid, Miss. Daisy earlier?" Vlad smirked and Danny winced under the two ghost's cold leers. Seems like someone wasn't too fond of the soup thermos.

"Aye, we know 'Im," Daisy drawled icily and Temple cracked his knuckles loudly, letting the little maid do the talking, "pure well indeed, sir..."

Vlad nodded satisfied and turned to another familiar face, "and of course there's our chauffeur Mr. Sullivan. He has been a soldier in war and is capable of driving any vessel."

The long-haired ghost squirmed with a smile, "that's enough for me, sir, find someone else to praise."

"Very well, well that leads us to our gardener, Mr. Vic," Vlad continued and turned to the last staff member, a ghost unfamiliar to Danny, but if he had to guess, he'd say the ghost had been a hippie in his human life.

The loosely dressed ghost looked young and lanky with long blue limps and deadlocks. He pushed his black Lennon sunglasses up on his nose to glare at Danny, "heard you don't wanna drink my smoothies, not cool, man, not cool."

Danny had just retuned their glares, the only one still cheery about this whole meeting was Vlad.

He clapped his hands expectedly, "now, people, Daniel here is part of the family now and should be addressed and treated with respect, the standard I'll say. And speaking of standard, make appearance, people."

The five ghosts turned human looking with their glamour and bowed to the master of the house before attending their duties.

"Now that you're familiar with the servants, I like to simplify a couple of rules, Daniel," Vlad started and walked to the study's direction, expecting Danny to follow along like some trained puppy.

Danny scowled, but did it anyway, "gee, rules. Haven't seen *that* coming."

Vlad just chuckled by the teen's antics and held the door like a gentleman, "then they should be easy to follow, hmm?"

Danny rolled his eyes and took a seat in one of the velvet couches, almost disappearing down the plush. Vlad closed the door and walked to one of the glass cabins and fished out two glasses and a bottle of bourbon shining like dark amber.

"The rules are simple, Daniel. First of all, you're living under my roof now, which makes my word a rule by itself," he simplified and served a glass before the teen. Danny took the glass, sniffed the content and caught Vlad's eyes.

The man held the connection and took a sip of his own. Challenging Danny to do the same or chicken out. Danny glared and took an even bigger sip than his foe. He wouldn't be displaying himself as the weaker part in this game, but didn't get the game Vlad was playing at.

None of them would get affected by the whisky, so what was the deal? Danny took another sip, trying to get use to the strong smoky taste. There was something familiar in it he couldn't quite put his finger on…

"Second," Vlad continued and took the couch facing the teen, "you will not be allowed to enter my private lab, study or bedroom without my permission. The rest of the castle is to your use as you please, as long as you don't destroy my property, get in the way of the servants work and break the ladies' privacy. Understood?"

Danny guessed it was fair, "got it."

He tasted the whisky again, still not sure why it was so familiar. For some reason he thought of Christmas, but that was just weird. He emptied it and Vlad refilled it without a word.

"Excellent, furthermore, I expect you to respect the servants and be polite to the guest I or Arianna may bring to the castle. Any visitor you want to bring here should go through me first and I mean it. I won't tolerant any nightly visitors and unauthorized teenage parties under my roof. Do I make myself completely clear?"

Danny rotated the glass to make the ice rattle, heh funny, “compredo-comando!”

Vlad lifted an eyebrow and smirked amused. Danny didn’t know what was so damn funny…well maybe all those ugly busts and paintings of Vlad and his ancestors. They all seemed pretty American until you reached some of the more ancient relics.

Then they all got darker hair, stronger jaws and noses. Colder eyes.

“Vladimir is a Russian name, right?” Danny asked and tipped his head back over to drain the glass.

Vlad stopped the glass on the way to his lips, giving Danny a curious look, “well, that and it has origins in most of Russia’s surrounding countries. Why the sudden interest, Badger?”

Danny didn’t know, but it had come to mind and he followed that particular train of thoughts, waved for Vlad to refill his glass, “those guys over there look like they would fight a bear with an axe if it crossed their path, they’re your family, right? You look like them a lot, you’re Russian or something?”

Vlad was more hesitating with the bottle this time, but gave Danny what he wanted and tapped his own glass with a finger, looking like he was debating something with himself.

“I’m part Russian. On my mother’s side, I guess the right term would be a Russian-American.”

Danny started giggling, “then Vlad junior would be a Dane-Russian-American, heh.”

Danny got an inner image of a dark-skinned baby with Vlad’s face and broke down sobbing with laughter. Vlad shook his head, but couldn’t hide his own amusement.

“I’m afraid it gets more complicated than that, my boy. Dear Arianna, herself is a fifth generation descendant of Kenyan immigrants settling in Denmark. On her mother’s side, of course. You may recall from the wedding that half of the bride’s row were black and not the typical white Dane as her father.”

“Kenyan?”

“Kenya is a land in Africa, Daniel, most famous for their Olympic runners,” Vlad lectured him patiently, leaning forward as if to study him, “say, Daniel, how about we play a little game, hmm?”

Danny felt dizzy and tried getting rid of it with the bourbon. A game sounded fun, “sure.”

“Alright, I answer one of your question’s truthfully and you answer on of mine, deal?”

Danny nodded, everything sounded a little woolen, but he forced himself to focus on the man.

He couldn’t lose the game or else he’d be the weak one…. although he couldn’t really remember the reason why or why he should care, but whatever, “’kay…have you ever fought a bear?”

Vlad nodded and served him more bourbon, “a ghost bear and if I remember correctly you were the one who send it after me along with the rest of my failed ghost mutants, after you blocked my powers with that belt. My turn. Tell me, Daniel…did you ever try alcohol before you got your ghost powers? Or experienced being drunk after?”

“Eh nope and yep! I got wasted at the Christmas truce once. Woke up without any memory of how I ended up naked next to Desiree in her lair. Still won’t tell me what happened that night. this stuff kanda smells the same as that,” Danny slurred with a grin and made Vlad’s smile widened.

“Interesting, how do you feel right now?”

Danny wiggled a finger in the man’s face, “n-no, one qu-uistion per turn, your cheater.”

Danny sipped his whiskey and tried coming up with a good question, while Vlad made sure to keep the teen’s glass filled.

“Say, what’s really in those pills and that nasty green smoothie? Wha’ is it?”

“It’s an organic mix of the concentrated ectoplasm I invented in order to save Arianna’s life and the naturel vitamins that comes from ghost vines. I keep a large collection of plants from the Ghost Zone in my greenhouse, that our gardener Vic is specialized in maintaining. The smoothie is just a natural nutrition boost for our ghost halves and a healthy organic snack for our human part, nothing more. The pills are just for helping Arianna’s fertilizing.”

Vlad balanced his elbow on his knees, catching the teen’s blurry eyes, “now tell me, Daniel, why did you really make the deal about coming here?”

Danny squinted confused, “what do ya mean?”

“Don’t misinterpret my question, I am more than *happy* to finally have you under my guidance and as a part of my family, but it occurs to me that you didn’t just make this deal to get simple information, you easily could have obtained yourself by running into dangerous situations and challenges as you always do.”

Vlad sighed by the mere image and sized the drunk teen with his voice, “you would only have to run into a trap, get caught by Runner and his guards, get him to rant and then escape as it would be your rather foolish and undesirable style of getting things done – and voila, you would know exactly what I’ve told you. An even easier way would have been forcing it out of Skulker, but no, you came to me with an unrefusable offer of succumbing to me. So the question remains…why did you make the deal?”

Easy question. “I wanted to make sure you didn’t harm Dani and Arianna,” Danny said slowly with an even slower train of thoughts, “’cause you al-always screw people over, yes you do!”

“And?” Vlad kept pressing, “what more?”

“…” Danny opened his mouth but couldn’t get the words out as he wanted them. Why had he made that deal again?

His clouded mind told him it really was due to heroism like getting a foe to give away his evil ways and keeping loved ones’ safe, but that didn’t seem to ad up with the teen’s whiskey drugged mind anymore.

Without the normal inhibitions and compelled ideas about what he should think and say, a whole new set of insights appeared on his retina like pearls on a string. Danny blinked with the new realizations, the new understanding of himself.

“I…I wanted to take up the offer…”

Vlad’s eyes widened a bit. He stood slowly and the predator moved towards his prey, kneeling beside the doubtful teen and placing a hand on his shoulder for comfort and control.

“Why is that?” Vlad pressed on with a voice he forced to be gentle.

Danny looked down, ashamed.

“It’s just…I’m always struggling with my powers, a-always meeting dead ends when I try to improve…it’s so frustrating!” Danny growled and clenched his fist in despair, “I’ve had these powers for f-four years and I’m not even close to anything like you, ‘cause that’s just it. Before I met you, I didn’t h-have anything to measure with, no one to compare to…I…I just…”

Vlad blinked surprised when heavy tears started falling from the teen’s cheeks, not registered or dried away.

Danny was to lost in his own deception, “…I became so happy the second I learned that there was someone else like me. Someone that understood what it was like to be like this. You had experience, you offered to train me there on the spot, teach me everything I needed to know…and then you *crushed* it.”

Danny was looking at Vlad now, seeing the man with open eyes heavy with the ghost alcohol Vlad had dozed into his private bottles.

“To be with my own kind, I would have to abandoned my own family,” Danny whispered and shook like he was freezing, “to belong, you demanded that I left my loved ones. How could you ask that of a child, Vlad? How could you crush my hopes like that? How could you be so selfish?”

Vlad looked like Danny had slapped him. The teen felt the second experience of alcohol take hold of him and rose from the chair, while

the man remained kneeling. Lost in the boy in front of him, too absorbed by the other's words and fast mood swings to move.

"I just wanted what was best for you, Daniel."

"No you wanted what was best for *you!*" Danny shouted furious with tears blurring his eyes, "you saw another halfa and you wanted it. But you didn't want me because of who I am – you wanted me because of my ghost half! Cause that's just it, *isn't it!?* If I didn't have these powers who knows if Sam and Tucker would even look to my side? It's like everything's about my powers now. I'm only worth something because of what that portal made me, because of my powers, because of that freak I've become!"

Vlad sensed his little game was getting out of control and stood, grabbing the boy's shoulders comfortingly to calm him down, "that's not true, now listen –"

"No you listen!" Danny slurred angry and pushed him away, "you're no better than all the rest! My parents say they'll be there for me, but when have they last been there for me? How long has it been since they acknowledge that they had another child than the perfect stipendium daughter in college? The only reason they even started talking to me again, is because of my powers! I've finally become strong enough to maintain my own ghost territory and fought enough ghost of to get my grades up because of it – and now they finally seem to notice me again. Do you see the fucking irony in this? I have to become a greater ghost for them to love their human son, I have to lose more and more of myself to the stranger they hate and despise, for them to finally look at me again! How fucked up is that!?"

Danny pressed a hand to his mouth, his emotion taking hold of him and making him spill hidden fears, sorrows and anger.

"For Fenton to be noticed, Phantom had to take over every part of my life. The only space my human half is allow, is the little leftovers the ghost in me can discard as useless. I thought I could go on like this, that it was good enough to be Fenton if I was a hero and had friends that supported me. I thought that if I protected the town I would finally be able to forgive myself for opening the portal in the first place and make my own home a ghost town…but you were right

all along. I'm just going to continue stumble through life without dreams or any other propose than staying a stupid hero no one asked for, no one whished for and no one wanna see having a future for himself."

Danny hiccupped when strong arms pulled him in and settled him against a firm, but warm chest. It reminded him of the long-lost memories of the way his mother had held him, before she started calling him clingy and ended the hugs before they even started.

Vlad wasn't going to let Danny go before Danny did and it made the teen shake with sorrow. The last person to hold him like this, caring and accepting with a core matching his own pulse, had been Arianna the night she'd been preparing to leave him.

Danny buried his face into the man's suit.

"I made the deal, c-cause I wanted to be accepted," Danny hiccupped, "Arianna would be here, s-so I hoped you could have ch-changed. That you had c-come to understand why you can't give up your family, even if…if…if it means you have to give up on *yourself.*"

Nausea took the last of Danny's strength and Vlad gasped when the teen vomited on the carpet…

-

"So how much do you remember after he said he wanted to play that drinking game?"

Danny snapped out of his blurry memory two weeks back and stopped spinning in the desk chair, "not much Sam. I remember faintly we talked about his family, something about his mother's side to be Russian or something. I think I yelled at him at some part? But it's all just gone – is that really what it's like to be drunk? You drink to you get sick and everything's become black and you wake up in your own bed with a bowl next to your bed and faint memories of doing things you can't recall? Is that typical?"

Tucker pursed his lips, *"nah, I think that's just how ghost booze works, dude. Don't worry about it."*

Danny sighed and hang on the chair, “it was probably nothing, hell for all I know, I could have puked on Vlad’s dress shoes and not even remembering it.”

His friends snickered by that image and Danny saw the display had long since passed midnight, “gotta go, guys. You might have summer vacation, but in Fruitloop town you rise with the sun.”

He closed his new laptop after whishing his two friends good night. The screen turned dark and he looked back at his own reflection. Allowed the forced smile to fall in the heavy silence.

Danny could keep telling himself and Vlad that he didn’t remembered anything from that night, but how long could he fool himself like this?

“Why did I tell Vlad those things?” he whispered and watched his own silent reflection.

And what will he do with that knowledge?

Chapter 27

Arianna was beginning to see a bad pattern.

It had formed during the weeks Danny had spent at the castle and slowly, but steady, it had formed inside the metaphorical fish tank, that was her growing family and the routine they were moving within.

She didn't like what she saw.

NOT one bit.

The morning had started out as usual. The billionaire patriarch and businessman had walked out the dollhouse and left her with two teenagers sulking over their breakfast, like some bad sitcom, where she would play the over peppy housewife in stilettos and pearls.

Probably that kind of woman who would spicing her smoothie with vodka from her styled flask when only the ordinance was there to watch her emotional turmoil. A pretty well-known script really.

You had your typical low-key son of the house, looking bored and even stressed out, while the younger daughter stabbed her food like it had offended her personally; looking stylish correct in her new cloths, but openly rebellious to, for the sake of challenging drama series stereotypes.

The American family – halfa edition.

Had it been any other dysfunctional family, Arianna would had grabbed a tray of popcorn to watch the drama, but this was her supernatural dysfunctional family, so the popcorn would have to wait until they reached the American good-feeling barbeque party before the end credits all Hollywood produced movies always promised.

Cause guess what? The ghost gloves were officially off.

"Kids, could you two please come back here for a second? I like to talk with you both."

Both teens peaked up in confusion over her calm, but dire voice and returned to the seats they had tried to escape from a second before.

Arianna folded her hands on the dining table, giving them a stern look.

“Listen, I don’t know what have happened between the two of you, but I want an end to it. And don’t try to deny it,” she continued, when Danny tried cutting her of with some lame excuse, “you two haven’t talked in almost two weeks now and when you’re not ignoring each other at the table, you two play some disturbing Hide and Seek game that’s gradually become 'Hide and Hide' instead.”

She watched them as they both crossed their arms in dismissive unison and even turned their head to steal a glance at the other at the same time. Both look away again with lookalike scowls.

The older female gestured to Dani, “all right, Dani you’re the youngest so you’ll get to tell me first. What is this about?”

The little halfa wasted no time and pointed at the other.

“Danny is bitching on me for caring for dad,” Dani said accusing, riling the other teen up in the process.

“I’m not! You’re the one who – !”

“Let Dani finish,” Arianna cut him off and nodded to her daughter, “go on.”

“It’s not fair,” Dani continued and glared at Danny, “you come here and try ruin everything, just because you don’t like Vlad. He’s changed, he really has! Right, mom? – If you don’t like being here, Danny, you can go home to your *own* family and stop trying to fuck up ours!”

“Don’t curse,” Arianna corrected her. Vlad wouldn’t have it and Arianna guessed he had a point, even though she’d never seen profane words as any problem when the kids was in their teens.

Vlad’s snack cursing on the other hand…

“My turn, Supreme Judge?” Danny asked sarcastic and she nodded with royal authority.

The further reflection on her husband’s mysterious origins of weird choice swearing theme, would have to wait.

“Okay, first of all, I’m not trying to ruin your family – you can’t ruin something that’s none existing, anyway – second, I didn’t want do this,” Danny said with a heavy sign, “but you two are serious dense if you insist on trusting Plasmius. When I didn’t wanna come with him at first, he threatened to kill Jazz with a remote that control bloodstreamed nanobots in her body. Does that sound ‘changed’ to you guys!?”

Danny challenged them to gainsay him and Dani’s hands flared along with her eyes, “you’re lying!”

Arianna stopped the fight even before it had begun by making two shades pulling the teens from each other.

Dani sneered furiously while Danny turned to the older halfa with pleading eyes, “you have to believe me!”

Arianna remained calm, “I do.”

“I’m not lying, I – wait…you do?”

Danny and Dani blinked dumbfounded, and Arianna made the shades release them now that they had forgot all about fighting, “sure, it sounds exactly like something Vlad would do.”

“But…” Dani stammered weakly, eyes darting from her to Danny, “he didn’t hurt Jazz…did he?”

“Well?” Arianna joined in, “did he?”

Danny lifted a puzzled eyebrow, like he didn’t understand why they kept asking in. It was clear to see on his face that he meant Vlad’s threat alone should be enough to convict the man.

“Well, no – I left with you guys and he promised to give me the remote when we arrive here.”

So, it's destroyed now?" Arianna asked and the teen nodded.

"Yeah, I burnt it myself – but just because it's gone, doesn't justify what he threatened to do. He was going to kill my sister if I didn't come!"

Arianna looked at him curious, "okay, I get that, but what I don't understand is, why you coming with us was a problem to begin with, Danny. Weren't you the one to aske Vlad if you could come live with us in the first place?"

The teen opened his mouth, but then closed it again, beginning to see the part of the story not adding up. Dani watched them pending and scooted over to Arianna's side of the table, taking visible side with her mother.

Danny frowned by that, "well, yeah! But he kept altering the deal – first he took my summer vacation and then he took the day after my graduation, when we totally agreed on giving me one last day with my friends and family at home before moving me here."

"His meeting in New York was moved, Danny, I told you," she retorted, "listen, Vlad have been thrilled ever since you asked him if you could live here. He has been looking forward to this for three months and talked about it none stop. Can you really blame the man for going into panic, when you went back on your word and didn't want to come?"

The poor teen looked as if his head would explode, "it wasn't like that and that's still a shitty excuse for almost killing my sister – and you know it."

She just shrugged, "nah, had it been me, I would probably just have beaten you to a pulp and dragged you on the plane to hold you on to your word. And nobody got hurt, so can the two of you please just make up and settle this nonsense?"

Dani subjecting herself under Arianna's uncompromising gaze, but Danny resisted. Obviously reluctant to let the matter go and held her gaze with sheer stubbornness.

“Danny,” she said warningly, but he held his ground. Not impressing her on bit, “unless you hug it out with Dani right now, I’m going to stop training you. Permanently.”

That seemed to do the trick and the teens hugged awkwardly at first, but soon both thawed and remembered just how much they had missed each other in the end.

Arianna pulled them both in for a group hug and lifted them of the ground for fun, making both shriek when they lost footing.

“I hate being mad at you two,” she whispered into their black tresses and let the grinning teens go, “all right, Dani, I told your tutor that you would be a little late, so of you go and Danny I’m sorry, but I can’t train you right away. I have to go to a charity conference in Milwaukee.”

"Why?” Danny asked, curiosity overturning disappointment.

“I have to keep my story about being a captive victim up, so I’m going to different conferences to tell just how hard and horrible it was – you know, to entertain the masses and help others who have been though something alike to feel better about themselves.”

Dani made a face while she just shrugged, “unless I write a book about it, it will probably stop in a few weeks. I’m not going to keep up the popularity. It's dreadful.”

Danny rolled his eyes, but she could tell he wasn’t to unreasonable, “I guess I have the day of then.”

Both looked up as Daisy phased though the wall and bowed for her mistress before holding out a coat and purse, “de bentley is waitin' oyt front, Mrs. Masters.”

“Thank you, Daisy,” the older halfa said as she allowed the maid to flitter around her and turned to the teens, “I will be back same time as Vlad, so try doing something together – just have fun with each other, okay? It’s summer. Do something stupid and reckless, be teenagers!”

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Danny waved along with Dani, as Arianna left the castle and started walking along with her in the lack of better ideas, “this doesn’t mean I’m gonna trust the fruitloop.”

“Oh my God! Just let it go, Danny,” Dani groaned and led him through three walls, “or at least stop making me feel like some traitor, you just have to give it some time – please!”

Danny was not going to do that, but kept it to himself. He didn’t feel like losing Dani again and if he need support in this he could always turn to his friend and girlfriend on the screen.

He found comfort in that though.

“Okay I get it, where’re you taking me anyway?”

“Duh, I’m going to my lessons, you just decided to tag along, dummy,” she grinned and went for a door at the end of the corridor, “I have math today with my tutor, he’s pretty cool, but kind of a bookworm. But that’s alright I guess – he sometimes talks about you.”

Danny gave her a confused look, “he knows me?”

“You tell me,” she said and opened the door, “sorry for the wait!”

Danny walked in, curious to meet this tutor and stopped dead in his steps, “YOU!”

“ME!” Ghost writer grinned and made the light reflect in his sharp teeth.

Unlike the castle’s staff, he was in his ghost form and sat confident by his magical keyboard, making papers and writing materials fly around the room like little birds.

“What the hell you’re doing here!?” Danny sneered and took a stand between Dani and the ghost.

Dani pushed him to the side with rolled eyes and took a seat by the table in front of the keyboard.

“Tutoring me, remember? His teaching me all the things I haven’t got

time to catch up with and is making me ready for school in September."

Danny send the snickering ghost a glare, "oh yeah? And who hired him in the first place? Let me guess, it was Vlad, wasn't it? He's the only one stupid enough to hire this lunatic."

Ghost writer tapped on one the tangent and made a heavy book fall atop of Danny's head.

"Aren't you suppose to ruin a holyday somewhere?" the ghost asked with a smirk.

"Aren't you supposed to be in jail?" Danny replied and made the specter laugh dryly.

"Oh I forgot how annoyingly sarcastic you could be, ghost-kid. No, I got out of jail when The Fright knight blasted my cell and offered me a job on behalf of his boss. I took the job and now look at me!" he said and put an arm around the smiling Dani, "now I got the beautiful opportunity to place my grand knowledge and art into the mind of a brilliant student. I even have time to write my newest novel in process in this castle, without looking out for Walker or poem hating ghost teens. I call it *'the halfa family'*."

Danny separated them with a scowl and placed his face closely to the ghosts with a whisper, "you touch her and I kill you."

Ghost writer tapped on his keyboard as an answer and made a second table appear next to Dani, "you must be an imbecilic to even think I would even dream of harming a student, nonetheless the daughter of maybe the two most feared ghosts of the zone. But since you clearly have a judgmental opinion of my person, what about you see for yourself and join us in the hour of knowledge? Maybe you even learn something."

"Nope," Danny deadpanned and walked to the door, "it's freaking summer, I don't do homework in summer, thank you very much."

"Suit yourself," the ghost chimed with a knowingly smile, "but you know where to find me when college gets too much for your 75 IQ,

ghost-kid."

Danny turned around in the door with a sinister smile, "oh, I will – and I'll bring a big basket of *oranges* while I'm at it."

The mention of the infamous lime fruit, made the ghost hiss in fear and hide beneath his keyboard to Dani's surprise and Danny great amusement, "see you at lunch, Dani."

-

Danny had wandered the castle for around two hours now and found that the castle was the most bizarre place he had ever wandered.

And he had been to the ghost zone, don't forget that.

If the content of the many pointless rooms wasn't enough to question this place – the décor was. Danny had passed several paintings of cheese, relatives of Vlad, and as expected; painting of the fruitloop himself in ugly historical settings.

But nothing had prepared him of the rest of the motives. Danny had just been passing an old-time painting, when his mind caught up to him and questioned the fact that the person in the frame was black.

Danny had walked back to the old-time painting and rose an eyebrow when he recognized the black woman in the Italian baroque setting as Arianna.

The teen began to search between the many painting more deliberately now and found several more handmade paintings of the female halfa around the castle. Some alone, some with Vlad in time matching attires and some again with Dani.

Danny didn't understand it. What was wrong with normal digital cameras? Why did Vlad always have to be so extra? He deadpanned when the freaking cat turned up in the paintings. The white Persia even had its own paintings – Yikes.

To his great relief, he found no painting of himself, but expected that Vlad would possible ask him to sit for a painter one of these days, or just use a picture of the teen for references. Those painting looked

hundred percent handmade and expensive as hell.

Danny was no rich lunatic, but in his opinion, there was more useful things you could use your money on. Videogames and charity for starving children in Africa, as an example.

Danny shook his head and moved on. He had come to find that some of the rooms would be equipped with little gold signs, if they were important enough.

He had already passed Vlad's private library and study – and Danny pretty much knew by now where the (pun as he expected) *master* bedroom were, so the rest of the place was free for him to walk around and discover as he pleased.

He closed the door to the tenth broom closet he had found so far and took the doors one by one.

A living room dedicated to hunting trophy's.

A private cinema.

An infirmary. Danny noted the ultrasound Scanner and asked himself if that was for pregnancy or broken bones and continued on.

A library.

A second, third and fourth library.

A billiard room that screamed of old noir style and old man gaming. Ew.

A room displaying maps both of the human and ghost world. Danny had to get back to this place.

A music room, complete with a surround sound and every instrument the human race could possibly have created in history – and a wall filled with books on how to play them.

Hundred and one living rooms.

Possible thousand and two guest rooms – and no, they didn't have the

custom designed toilet package his had been equipped with. Hmmm.

Private dining room and small kitchens (for what purpose, Vlad?)

A game room that made Danny's former rich kid crib with the game chairs and consoles look like a joke. Possible Dani's?

A conference room.

A museum for the honor of the Dairy king (and apparently, king-s) and the castle's history.

A human gym next to the white training room, Arianna had encoded his ghost signature and trained him in.

The ballroom the reunion had been held in and the cinema, matching parlor and two balconies.

A room showing off all Vlad's gun and riffles. Danny had picked up one of guns and checked the design, discovering something quite disturbing. These wasn't for hunting or humans. They were for ghost.

Danny had carefully put the gun back where it belonged and eyed the shooting range in the other end of the room. Fucking fruitloop…

Danny left the castle for a short time to investigate the outdoor area and flew past the huge football fields, before settling over the enormous greenhouse growing out of the castle's south side.

He took a quick peek inside and almost broke his speed record when he fled the place again. The inside wasn't just pretty tropic flowers or fruit trees. Most of the greenhouse was for plants he had only thought the Ghost Zone would be insane enough to host.

And that meant living plants that snapped and bit everything that dared grace their presence.

Danny returned to the safe indoor castle and started walking around aimless again, before he abandoned the rest of the first, second and third floor and began the search for the basement.

He was pretty sure a castle like this would have one and possible a

secret torture room or prisoner ward held in creepy cobblestone, oil torches and cobwebs.

However, Danny was disappointed to find none of that and ended up wandering the underground that was just as well lighted and cozy as the rest of the castle, just without windows.

The indoor swimming pool and roman bath seemed normal enough compared to the lava pit he had found next door.

Danny had for a moment thought he had found the torture room, but found no grid or chains that could hoist people into the glowing lava mass or medieval torture instruments. Instead the teen had gotten that crazy impression that someone was *bathing* in here.

That is if the minibar, fire-repellent towels and mats along the edge to of the pit, was anything to go by. The heat had soon got too much for the teen's ice powers and he'd fled to the next room and got happily surprised.

It was an underground ice skating rink. Danny checked if anyone was watching or any cameras was spying before turning ghost.

Danny had been wanting to go to a skating rink ever since he discovered his ice powers and made skates of hard unmalting ice under his white boots.

Danny had skated on a frozen lake in his childhood, but since there was no skating facilities or winters that had been cold enough back in Amity, he had got that experience to spare.

"Here we go," he whispered to himself and slid out on the ice. He almost lost his balance, but remained uprising as he got to the middle of the rink.

Danny remembered being good at it as a kid and surprised himself just how much he could recall when he started drifting around and made figures. He lost his balance several times and had to pick himself up from the hard ice, but soon got his footing and got bolder.

He threw himself into neck breaking twist and skated with high speed before turning and almost end up horizontally in the bends.

The teen had then followed a creative whim and began to manipulate the ice. A slope rose in the middle of the rink and the teen shot out of it with a cry of joy, before he used his powers to stop the air and not end up outside the rink.

He couldn't stop snickering as he got a crazy idea and began to raise and lower the skate rink at will. Two slopes stood at each end of the rink and created a large open jump equipped with crocodiles formed of ice and long sharp spikes.

Danny had shortly thought of making a large number of trucks or school buses instead, but it was for slopes with rings of the fire and he had really wanted to make those crocodiles.

Danny tried to make one of them move, but soon found that it was too difficult and took up too much of his concentration and power. Without moving reptiles, Danny decided it was alright anyway and flew to the slope and stretched confidently.

"I should probably film this," he grinned and started skating as fast as he could. Picking up speed, before racing to the edge, is stomach turning a bit in excitement. He shot over the slopes launch like an arrow and made the jump with a cry.

The feeling of the free fall made his stomach jump and he admired his reptiles and deadly spikes before his long jump began to obey the pull of gravity. Danny cheered as he reached the other slope and slid down the slippery is.

Safe back on the rink's surface, he made a sudden stop with his skates sideways, making a small shower of ice in front of him. Behind him, the ice formations fell like water and the silence returned to the ice rink.

Danny's ears peaked when he caught the sound of a single person applaud and turned to the single row on his left. The ghost maid shriek when she was discovered and hurried to act like nothing had happened.

Whistling a nervous tone and flew to the rink's implement section.

Danny followed her, not letting her get of the hook that easy “hey, it’s Daisy right?”

The little ghost ignored him and lowered her head, trying to look busy. Danny followed her out as she drove out the Zamboni and parked it to open the rink’s fence.

Vlad had told him not to annoy the castle’s staff, but Danny still felt guilt for forcing her and the cook into the thermos back when he had been searching for Arianna. From what he had seen, they weren’t bad ghosts, they’d done nothing else than defending themselves and their home.

“Uhm…listen, I know you’re probably still mad at me for the whole thermos thing, but I wanted to apologies. I’m really sorry, it was wrong of me.”

The maid sighed, but didn’t turn around to face him, “Masters are not supposed ter apologies ter their servants, that’s very…gran' av yer.”

Danny wasn’t sure what to make of her tone. She sounded surprised and a little baffled even, as if apologizing to her was something big of Danny.

She returned to her more reserved tone,” but since Mr. Masters count yer as 'is heir now, oi suppose takin' yisser puny word is in order an' forgive yer.”

She turned around and nodded to Danny’s bewildered face, ignoring his outburst, “he counts me as his *what?*”

The maid continued as if she hadn’t heard him, “an' ter be fair, yer were kind av right aboyt Mr. Masters keepin' a prisoner, al' though dat term doesn’t seem correct ter use aboyt Mrs. Master. I wus wrong ter judge yer, sir Daniel. Yer were in yisser right ter infiltrate the castle…just don’t use dat soup container on me or de staff ever again. Please.”

Danny blinked, still a little puzzled, but took her little respectful bow anyway.

“O-okay, I promise I won’t,” he inspected her for a second, “so you

know about Vlad not being trustful?"

The maid huffed offended and made her green bob jump, "don't blather aboyt de master av de castle loike dat! 'oy dare yer?"

Danny sighed disappointed, "oh, come on, you work in this place, you must have seen some shady things around here. You honestly tell me you to think Vlad is a good guy?"

Daisy pouted and inspected the Zamboni for fuel and water, "Mr. masters may be a feared ghost by many in de Ghost Zone, but yer man 'av never laid 'an' on any av de castle's servants. If it 'asn't been for 'im, most av us wuld still be slaves in de Soul Center."

"Wow…" Danny deadpanned. Vlad had saved them all from slavery? That was actually really big of Vlad. The teen soon got over his admiration for the man, when the rest of his mind caught up with him, "but you still working as slaves, just for *him*."

The maid looked stunned for a second, before she surprised Danny by laughing loudly and not very girly.

"Forgive me, Mr. Daniel, but," she had to inhale to control her laughing, "I don't tink yer nu 'oy it's loike to be a slave den."

Danny's cheeks blushed and he remembered the two Asian twins Runner had been accompanied by. They had acted as living statues, never showing any emotions or life behind those dead eyes.

"I guess I don't…" he admitted and she gave him humored look.

"Oi 'av taken care av many young masters, but you're de first ter make me laughed loike dis in 300 ton years."

Danny gave her a look, "oh…you look pretty good for a 300-year-old maid. Never would have guessed that. Is it those green smoothies or something?"

She giggled like an old granny with a shy look and duplicated into ten.

Danny watched as one of the duplicates took the Zamboni to polish

the ice, when the other and original Daisy gestured for him to follow with a smile, “it’s lunch time, sir, please folly me.”

“Okay,” he said as they flew to the celling, “but just call me Danny. Everyone else than Vlad does.”

She nodded as if that had been a command, “as yer wish, sir Danny.”

Chapter 28

The reconciliation with Daisy had paid off in a way Danny haven't predicted or estimated.

The rest of the staff had stopped hating him.

It hadn't really been a problem for the teen, he was more than used to be disliked and eyed by ghosts without more valid reasons than the fact that he was 'the Ghost-kid', but he had to admit it was nice to not being shot daggers after by unfriendly eyes that lured behind every corner of the castle.

Well…the big cook still looked at him funny, but not in a way that made Danny question the fish on his plate and cheek it for boogers, salvia or poison.

Other things changed as well around him.

Now that he had Dani on his good side again, they would hang out more and Danny got and excuse for leaving the castle just for a few hours and go on trips with Dani and Arianna to Milwaukee, which again got him an excuse for now spending time with Vlad.

The man had started to creep the teen out in a way that Danny couldn't completely comprehend. One thing was being around Vlad without fighting him or being stalemated, something else was actually *living* on civil terms with him.

Danny had found it extremely weird to see Vlad outside his normal pompous business/arch enemy role and meet the everyday Vlad Masters.

Danny had known the man and half-ghost for almost four years and had more encounters with him than any other grownup male he knew – other than his father of course.

But watching Vlad walking around with a loose bolo tie, no suit jacket and the shirt's sleeves rolled up, was to close for the teen's likening.

Danny almost hadn't recognized the man when Vlad had sat down at the table one Sunday, wearing a black turtleneck and lose hair, instead of the formal suits and the neat signature ponytail. Danny didn't like the sudden confrontation of this new side of his arch enemy.

It was too…normal. To relaxed. To comfortable.

Danny wanted to keep the distance between them. To keep that big wall of mutual hatred and battle banter up between them, made of formal confrontations and prejudices without further digging into each other's persona life.

The good ol' distance made of stable facades that the teen knew and could predicted.

Not this… whatever this was supposed to be.

This was far to intimate – to family. Danny didn't like it one bit. It made him look at Vlad like a human – no good.

Danny wanted to express this fear of this missing closure situation to someone, but had a hard time explaining just what he was afraid of to his best friend and girlfriend.

They supported him, sure, but there weren't there to see for themselves and get the whole experience.

And now that he had learned the hard way that he couldn't go to Arianna or Dani without being told to give Vlad a chance or the servants – because they just *loved* the fruitloop – Danny was forced to figure this out for himself and find a way to recreate the wall of security he hadn't known he needed.

He wanted the man to hate and isolate him again, before it was too late. (Danny feared he might soon fall for the same trap as his clone and actually come to *like* the man – ew.)

So the teen did the only thing a rational teen would do when they didn't want to associate with a grown up. The only way actually.

Danny decided to declare war against Vlad.

-

Vlad was having a headache.

Not one of those that could be fixed with painkillers, massage or magnetic treatment. He already knew the course of it and started massaging his temples in favor of reading the papers in front of him on the desk, "*fiddle faddles.* That ghost arena will be the death of me."

Vlad didn't stop the ministration of his pained head, when his secretary bussed on the private intercom and just pushed the button to kill the ringing sound.

"Yes?" Vlad said with a strained voice.

"*It's your wife, Mr. Masters,*" his secretary stated neutral, "*she's going to be late on the conference in New York, but expects to be home around midnight.*"

By the reminder of his wife, Vlad took the picture frame on his desk and smiled tenderly at the image of his wife and daughter, "I see, then I have no reason to wait at the office – tell Sullivan to drive the limo up front."

"*I see that its done, have a nice weekend, sir,*" the secretary replied in a dutiful manner and ended the connection. Vlad stretched in the seat and started to pack his briefcase, as he tapped his wrist watch.

He needed to know what the Cube was up to.

"Fright Knight, report."

The ghost appeared on the unfolded screen and bowed dutiful, "*the enemy has moved south of the northern Wisconsin and will stay there until another break in our barricade allows them to differ.*"

Vlad sought out to his fifteen duplicates spread around the country to moved them to new positions in order to make the barricade stronger with new strategic positions in case of a southern attack.

The move made his eyes black out for a second and he had to lean up against the desk for a second, "try find a soft spot in their defenses

and report back as soon as possible."

The medieval ghost bowed, "as you command, my liege."

Vlad found the next subject on his mind and tapped the screen, "Vultures."

The three minions showed up on the screen, all of them balancing on a spectator rows, munching on snacks and cheering along with the audience outside the screen's periphery.

"*Ah, Boss, - hey boys! The Boss say's hei!*" the leader greeted and the screen got a feathered wave from the other two.

Vlad lifted an eyebrow, "tell me, how is the game going?"

The vultures sighed, "*boring. It mus' been something vhen they had all their fighters and not thie'se young nevbies to fight. The rovs is only half filled and the final fight is betveen a grass core ghost and a ghost with've vater powers. Boring – but thanks for the tickets, Boss!*"

This pleased the half-ghost. If the Cube's arena fights were having a downfall in spectators and interest, the place would soon end in bankruptcy and with that an end of their support.

He smirked over the good news and congratulated himself for being the one to bring a final end to the Soul Center's greats entertaining source.

"Excellent. Continue watching the games, I want a direct report if anything changes."

Vlad switched to the next matter and found the hunter's face, "Skulker, report."

The hunter told him a resembling story about his position and team of mercenaries, and Vlad dismissed him with a last order.

He knew it was unlikely, but still hoped in a way that the situation would have changed out of this miserable gorilla fight with the Cube and change into an actually confrontation that would end this whole tiresome ordeal.

The half-ghost took a minute to reach out to his battalions of duplicates and checked their defenses, their mutual telepathic connections and his own mobility of everyone and each.

Under different circumstances, he would have taken a second to praise himself of his power to mobilized an army of perfect stigmergy and flawless tactics, but couldn't really get the motivation with his gradually splitting headache.

Vlad went to his desk and pulled out on of his emergency flask from the drawer and took a light swig. The ghost alcohol mixed with the brandy made his head clear for a second and he felt a moment of bliss.

The constant warfare and mental overexertion was beginning to reach him on a grueling level and if that wasn't enough, he was unfortunate enough to have his own battles outside the ghost world as well.

The New York deal was gradually starting to reach the last critical point where it would be all or nothing and Vlad would have to put his entire attention and office into it now that his ghost powers were depleted elsewhere. No easy deals this time.

The Home Front was not much better either, although it always brought him a few hours of peace to be welcomed home by his two girls and Maddie.

Vlad couldn't for his life remember how he had managed life before them, or what an empty castle had sounded like, but it was a change he was ready to kill in order to maintain.

Their love weighed heavily up for Daniel's continuing hostility, but that was a problem Vlad knew he just had to give some time.

When the boy had been a part of his home a few months he would probably start warming up to Vlad and as soon as the deal and business contract was in the house, Vlad would finally be able to focus more on his home life and put the work a little behind him for a change.

With these self-assurances, Vlad left his office a little more at ease and nodded a goodnight to his secretary, who held the door.

His employees greeted him as he moved to the elevator and those who had occupied it hurried to leave it and leave it empty for him to ride it alone.

Vlad ignored them and their antics, listening to the classic music of the elevator as the two doors closed and tried to get a grip on the new wave of pain that shoot through his head.

He received more humble greetings as he moved through the foyer and nodded to the guard at the entrance.

“Have a good night, Mr. Masters.”

The limo waited out front as it was procedure and Sullivan tipped his cap, as he opened the door for his employer. Vlad relaxed into the deep seats and ignored Sullivan as he started making wits on the intercom.

“Welcome to Sullivan’s haunted limousine service, this is their chauffeur speaking. Are you tired of annoying and sticky humans requiring too much of your time and attention on the job? We have the solution, go home. Stay there and live there. We guarantee a relaxing environment, understanding family members, professional staff and a location that is hundred percent haunted. Sullivan’s limo service – only you know how much you want to go home!”

A band of white pain shoot through Vlad’s temples and he found himself eyeing the minibar. The headache had left a bad taste in his mouth along with the ghost liquor from his office, but it didn’t change that he could really use a drink.

His hands searched among the many expensive selections and pulled out one he had received from the Skulker as a wedding gift.

Well, it was more of a part of a wedding gift – the rest of the green liquor the gift box had contained was back at the castle, where it had filled Vlad’s cabinets.

He poured the last if the flask’s content into a faceted glass and

pressed a fabric napkin with ice cubes to his head. The green liquor shone serene in the limo's lights and Vlad recalled the first day Daniel had spent in his home.

Getting the boy drunk like that hadn't really been his intention at first. Losing him up a little and maybe get him to talk, yes – but drunk as a sailor? Absolutely not.

But it should probably not have come as a surprise that the boy was such a light drinker.

It was the fewest fourteens year olds who had experience with alcohol and Skulker had once told him that Phantom had avoided the punchbowl every Christmas Truce, since his first encounter with the green sweet-smelling liquor.

Vlad turned the glass in his hand, admired the color. He had taken test on the alcohol and its impact on different types of samples of blood and caged subjects to learn about the liquor.

The alcohol was made from a couple of different fermented plant fluids you could only find in the Ghost Zone and the sweet smell was due to the flower that gave the final taste.

The flower 'deathblossom', was a relative of the ghost expelling flower 'bloodblossoms' past occult hunters had used to exorcise or kill evil spirits with. Unlike its relative, deathblossom didn't seek to reject its victims, but to attract them instead.

It was given its life-giving nutrients from the amount of ectoplasmic energy it drew from the larger currents that ran through the ghost zone like streams and if a ghost were weak or foolish enough to get lured by the smell, it would be pulled towards the flower and its sweet odor like a moth to a lamp and end up eating the flower's head.

A none prepared or distilled flower would in fresh form then anesthetize its victim, use its vines to pull the ghost under and start living of them like a carnivorous plant.

Vlad had once visit a deathblossoms field and felt hundreds of ghost

cores resting just beneath the field's surface covered by roots and black flowers. All of them lifeless, but still pulsing as if the plants kept the cores alive outside their former ectoplasmic bodies.

He had later been told the liquor would change taste depending on which core had been feeding the flower. Ice made it cold permanently, fire gave spice and grass would freshen it up.

Quite fascinating.

The finished produced that was the green liquor had turned out to hold an incurable poison if intake by humans or animal, while ghost would get drunk from it.

As a halfa, the liquor affected him the same way normal liquor would have affected a human system, meaning he would get drunk from it to, just maybe a bit more than a regular ghost would.

Unlike other ghosts, his body had responded almost with a double intoxication to deathblossom juice and made him death drunk, by the same time it would have made a ghost like Skulker feel tipsy.

Vlad had built up some resistance over the years, but all forgot the liquors curious effected when he had served the boy.

And boy, did he ben in for a surprise.

Vlad had always known Daniel had been walking down a troubled path with his heroism and naïve kindness, if not cocky act, but the boy's anguish and inner struggles had turned out to be far worse than the man had expected.

Vlad frowned and felt the anger towards the Fenton couple return from its slumber.

Neglecting their own child and their complete ignorance to his open turmoil. Leaving him to the mercy and little comfort of other teenagers, who would never be able to understand his situation and needs.

What kind of parents where they!?

The glass splintered in his hand and Vlad watched his hand heal without much interest. No scare was left behind, only blood and Vlad recalled the many times he had removed his shirt and found all cuts and bruises gone, only evident in his memory.

How many invisible scars did his little badger carry under his healed skin? How many broken hearts was contained in that ribcage of his? Broken dreams and hopes left in the night to cry out for nobody to hear?

‘Time heals all wounds’. A foolish and ignorant saying in his opinion. Nothing like that would ever heal with time or speed healing. Nothing.

Vlad had been forced to heal himself and work for his own salvation when he had first become a halfa. Daniel would never have to go through that, Vlad would give him the home and security he deserved.

The live he should have had from the start.

Vlad’s dark thoughts was interrupted as the limo came to a hold and Sullivan opened the door, “welcome home, Mr. Masters.”

The sudden light from the spotlights that lit his castle got the headache to increase in strength again and Vlad wanted nothing more than to throw himself in his favorite chair in front of the fireplace and end the day with one of his stronger bottles.

“Thank you, did my wife take one of the cars from the garage when she left this morning?”

“She did, the white farrari, sir.”

Vlad could only smirk by that sight, “very well, you can take the night off then.”

Sullivan thanked him and drove the limo down to the underground garage, as Vlad took the stairs to his home and was meet by Daisy, who bowed and took his coat.

“Master daniel an' danielle 'av already 'ad bill skinner, sir, but temple

is ready ter serve dem if yer wish."

"No thank you, you can both take the night off," Vlad informed with a short wave of his hand and headed for the great living room.

The thought of food gave him nausea and he just wanted some peace. Maybe even waiting up for Arianna and end the long week with her under the shower.

That was a happy thought.

The fireplace was already lit when he entered the room, but Vlad shot a blast into the logs anyway in order to make the fire bigger and maybe get some of his energy out of his system.

The New York deal had forced him to reschedule his training and he felt restless with all that energy running unused inside of him.

A startled yelp made the man aware that he wasn't alone in the living room. Daniel gave him an angry scowl from the large armchair he had been seated in, clearly ashamed of being scared by the fire and not sensing Vlad entering the room in the first place.

"If you gonna set fire to this shithole, when at least warn the rest of us."

Vlad had made it his routine to spend at least an hour every day to build up some connection to the boy, in order to reestablish their relationship into a more pleasant course, but right now he couldn't muster the energy for it.

The boy had apparently insisted on being downright nasty in his company ever since the little ghost booze incident and attack him at every angle possible. Normally he would just take it as teen rebellion and play along with his own clever wordplay…but not tonight.

He could feel the boy's eyes in his back as he god rid of his suit jacket and loosened his bolo tie and cuffs, before serving himself a large glass of his ghost related liquor. The boy made a disgusted face.

"Why the hell do you insist on drinking that shit? It's disgusting."

“I like to differ,” Vlad retorted strained and placed himself in the couch since the boy had taken his armchair. He wasn’t going to fight him for it. To tired.

Daniel sent him a strange look. Clearly sensing his change of mood and sniffing his anguish like a bloodhound…. or badger. Did badger scent their victims? He couldn’t remember.

“You look like shit.”

Vlad replied with an unpassionate rose of his eyebrow and took a large sip of his glass, before pressing the cold beverage to his temple. Hoping that him not responding would give the boy a hint.

Apparently, the teen had other plans.

“What happened?” Daniel pressed on, forgetting the book in his lap, “Arianna wanna divorce? It’s about time if you ask me. Or did the company lose a pen? You’re a weirdo when it comes to your stuff, I’ve seen your disk, it looks like a dissection table – that’s how freaking timed and ordered it is.”

Vlad just returned the jab with a sign and directed his attention to Maddie, who arrived with a purr and jumped into his lap. Daniel just rolled his eye, “fine, spill your day to your lone-guy cat, why don’t you? I think Arianna is jealous of that feline though.”

“It’s her cat, Daniel,” Vlad replied and scratched the white Persia behind the ear, “if anyone should be jealous, it would be me. Those two is almost in synch.”

Vlad relaxed into the conversation and hoped it would remain civil like this, but once again the boy proved to be difficult.

“Why do you even bother to keep up act this, Cheesehead? A contract isn’t a real relationship and Dani’s only here because of Arianna. I don’t get what you’re trying to accomplice here. What do you need all these halfas for?” the teen asked suspiciously and Vlad could see new and strange theories tick in that head of his, “and whats up with you and trying to get a halfa kid? You already got Dani, why you need another child in your prison? Greedy much?”

“For the last time, this isn’t a prison, Daniel,” the man sighed and found that his glass was empty, “and both I and Arianna have looked forward to expand the family. And I believe Danielle would be more than happy to get a little sister or brother. You of all should know what it’s like to get a little sister, my boy. You’re welcome by the way.”

Daniel gave him a vexed look, “Dani’s not my little sister, it’s not like that and you know it – and I’m not your kid either and I’ll never be.”

Vlad just rolled his eyes and wondered if it was time to go to his bedroom, “give it some time, Daniel.”

The teen rose from his seat as an answer and walked over to stare him down with grave determination, “I’ll never be your son. You’re not my father.”

Vlad felt the anger rise along with his headache. He had expected this for some time now, but hoped the boy would have grown out of such childish manner. A little voice warned him to leave the boy alone, but he ignored it.

It was about time he put the boy in his place. He suspected Plasmius was leading him now, but didn’t care. He wasn’t going to stand for such talk in his own castle.

Daniel backed up a bit as Vlad rose and towered over him. The boy stood his ground, but was clearly alert. He should be.

“I'll give you one chance to give me an apology, boy,” he stated with a cold voice and unsaid promises of punishment if denied, “I have been patient with you and your brattish childish behavior, but this is my limit.”

Daniel snorted in false bravado, “or what? You gonna kick me out? Gladly.”

Vlad pulled him to his eyelevel with a grip in the boy’s t-shirt, tearing the collar a bit it in the during and sneered at the teen, “why do you insist on fighting me, hmm? Are you completely ignorant to the opportunities that is giving your sorrow person? Are you that

stupid!?"

Vlad knew he should stop, but shook the teen nevertheless, "I've given you a home and welcomed you to a sanctuary build by your own kind, for your own kind. You're not a human, Daniel! You belong with us, with other half-ghosts! I offer you a home of understanding and security and this is how you repay me!? *Answer me!*"

"Fuck you!" Daniel sneered and Vlad threw him through the room.

The boy turned in the air as he transformed and bounced of the wall with his feet first. Vlad transformed as well and retuned the blasts the boy threw at him.

It was a wonder no servants or Dani came running to see what the loud commotion was about, loud and damaging as it had ben. It had been over almost before it had begun as Vlad hadn't spared the teen from his anger and found himself almost choking the teen to unconscious in the end.

Vlad's humanly reason returned to him like a hammer and he let go instantly. Asked himself how he could have lost it like that so easy.

Daniel hurried to get away from him and rubbed his sore throat with toxic eyes. He sent Vlad one last furious glance before he stormed out the trashed room, yelling on the top of his lungs, "I HATE YOU!"

Vlad watched him leave and turned to the former living room with a resignedly look.

"Lucky Charms," he cursed and massaged his temples, the pain was nagging at him now.

He stared at the destruction of the room. Not a furniture spared or spot on the wall free from dents or burn marks. The fireplace was the only thing still functionally and the dancing flames seemed to mock him with its calmness.

The couch went flying and the broken lamp followed suit. He lifted the coffee table over his head and flung it against the wall where it broke to a million pieces, anger making him take out everything on

the still whole objects around him.

He ended up on the floor, breathing heavy after destroying the room completely and utterly.

Why did the boy had to be so…*stubborn!*

Something hard and cold rolled to his hand and he lifted it to threw it against the fireplace, but then stopped when he realized it was one of the bottles of deathblossoms from the broken cabinet.

He popped the lid without hesitation and took a huge sip. The warmth that rolled down his throat matched his frustration and dulled the raging headache for a time. He rose silently from the spot on the floor and started searching for the remained of his bar.

He could really use another drink.

-

Danny was wakened by a gentle nudge and he waved the person of, “its Saturday, Jazz, get out of my room.”

“Danny, it's me.”

He was awake instantly and sat up to see Nightshade hovering next to his bed, looking worried. “Danny, I can’t find Vlad.”

He frowned, had Vlad left? He transformed instead of changing out of his pajamas and followed her down to search. Not that he cared, but he wasn’t one to deny a person like her some assistance in need.

They had soon searched most of the first floor and Nightshade sighed as they had left the kitchen and ended up at the hall again, “he’ll have to be in his human form, I can’t sense him and I didn’t want to wake the staff because of this. Did he say anything about leaving or go for a walk before I got home?”

Danny bit his lip, “uhm…*noooo*…..he was in the living room with that sweet deep armchair last I saw him, but –”

She shot past him and he followed suit, trying to stop her from

entering the room and come up with a good excuse for why they shouldn't enter said room.

She gasped in shock by the state of the room and Danny hovered up next to try and explain himself, but lost his jaw instead.

Danny blinked in confusion, "okay, its way worse now than when I left it. I swear."

"When you left!? It looks as if something exploded in here! What the hell were you two doing!?"

"We…uhm…we kinda had a fight."

"How much of a fight?"

Danny rubbed his neck, not sure what to say, "okay, it got a little out of control…."

"*A little?*" she asked incredulous, "Danny, the only thing missing in here for it to be the perfect crime scene is blood and if those stains on the floor is green because of ectoplasm, then –"

Danny snapped his fingers, "he's in the southern living room. That's where his stash is."

Danny could see the picture clearly now. The many broken bottles that tainted the floor must have forced the cheesehead to search for liquor elsewhere and the center of his spread bar cabinets had to be the place.

Just as expected, they found Vlad slumbering in a single armchair, surrounded by bottles and a bucked of melted ice. Arianna rushed to him, while Danny checked the bottles littering the floor.

The smell was no mistake, all of them labeled as ghost alcohol and all of them empty. Damn.

"God, Vlad," Arianna sighed and turned to Danny, "he's emptied every bottle? All of them!?"

"Yep," the teen replied, not knowing if he should be disgusted or

impressed.

She suddenly gave him a stern look, “what was that fight about, Danny?”

Danny just shrugged, “nothing special really, I just told him I don’t wanna be his son – it’s kinda routine between us.”

“Danny…” she sighed disappointed and turned to the sleeping man with three sad eyes, “we’ll talk about this in the morning – just help me get him to bed.”

Danny moved to the man’s other side with some aversion and gave the dozed man an indifferent look.

It was beyond him how the asshole could provoke such pity in everyone around him without even being conscious – well that and keeping his ghost core suppressed while being dead drunk as a sailor.

Danny scoffed under the heavy weight, “look at him, things don’t go his way and boom! He’s throwing himself in the hedge, playing the victim. Spot on Plasmius”

The teen was startled when a hand suddenly grabbed him and Arianna dragged him by the arm out of the living room and let him go with a push, “Danny this has to stop.”

“What has?” Danny blurted angry and brushed his hazmat suite off, “him not getting his will?”

“No you – when are you going to stop playing hero and villain?” she asked angrily and Danny crossed his arm.

Why the hell was she on to him all of a sudden?

“Who’s playing? That’s just how it is, it’s always been like that! He fucks up the world with his ghost powers, take what he wants, treat people like dirt and rub it in my face. If I’m not there to stop him, then who will? He’s evil!”

“And why is that?” she asked all serious like it wasn’t obvious, “because he uses his powers for other than community service?

Because he likes to get ahead on life? Because he's acting selfish? Because he's not out there saving people like you do? Is that it?"

Danny threw his hands into the air, "duh! Yes!"

She looked at him like she just realized something groundbreaking, "you really can't see past Plasmius can you? Is that really all Vlad is to you, Danny? An evil ghost?"

He just stared at her. She even had the nerve to sound disappointed of him and Danny felt his frustration turn to anger, "you make it sounds like there's something I'm missing here – he's acting evil and ruthless. He's hurting people, Arianna. I think I see him way more clearly than you."

She snorted with an arrogant smirk, "because I love him? You think I'm all enchanted and can't see over the tip of the rosy glasses and see for what he's really like, is that it?"

"None of you acknowledge what I have to endure every day! None of you see that he's a crazy fruitloop!" he yelled, took out the anger that had filled him over the last few weeks out on her.

It felt good to get it out and tell it to her face, he knew he would regret it later, but right now he had to get it all out. Making something completely clear between them. Between all of them.

It should be Vlad she was fighting with, not him.

She frowned dangerously and sized him by the shoulder with a low voice not giving room for interruption, "now you listen to me, Daniel Fenton, and you listen to me good. You're the one who can't see over your own damn nose here. You don't want to see past his ghost half – and you know why, Danny? Because it scares you. He's a human, Danny, just like you and me. He might not act like that, but it's the truth. I have done some unmentionable things myself, but I don't see you loathing me, now *do I?*"

"That's different," he mumbled, not given in, "you did those things because those slave masters forced you to – Vlad only do things out of his own wicked agenda. No one's forcing him to do any of that

shit. You don't enjoy hurting like he does."

"Oh really?" she replied unimpressed and let him go, "you really think half of the shit I pulled was forced on me? You don't think I can kill someone for the sake of my own satisfaction? Come on, Danny, don't make me a *saint.*"

"Compared to him, you're pretty damn holy, "Danny continued stubbornly and crossed his arms, "I don't see you using twenty years on planning on murdering your best friend and raping his wife, terrorizing their son and ruining millions of people's lives for selfish needs."

She laughed without any humor in her voice and send him a mocking glare, "didn't have the time, kid, but I did enjoy killing humans that resembled my mother. When they found out I preferred a certain type of victim, they started throwing in normal women along with the ghost hunters I killed for a private audience. Ever heard of the 'blood eagle'? It's called 'to roast a blood eagle' in Danish and was a favored execution method amongst the Viking. I gave it my own personal touch by phasing out the ribs and lounges of the back of those women, instead of cutting them out, but it had almost the same effect – just a slower dead in my case. Ever seen a lounge pump outside the human body, Danny? Imagine it still functioning on their backs, fully connected to them and breathing – I got it on tape when my mother tried sneaking into my wedding –"

The teen felt like throwing up and tried suppressing a gagging sound, "okay, okay I get it, you're not a saint, stop talking!"

She ignored his tone and shook him gently, "then stop being so blind and wake up, Danny! Vlad is a halfa just like you and me, human and ghost, you can't remove any part of it or turn a blind eye to what you don't want to acknowledge. You will have to live with him and me, and you will have to deal with it."

She sighed tiredly and gave him a stern look," think you can do that?"

Danny looked away, still not giving in, "…I don't know."

“Then make up your mind, kid. You might don’t like it, but some day you will have to face that me, Vlad and Dani, are the only of your kind. Beggars can’t be choosers and you kids and I need Vlad…but we will never need him as much as he needs us. He can’t live without us, Danny. He just can’t!”

She gave him one last adamant look, before going back to the living room. Danny sighed irritated and followed her in lack of better to do in the middle of the night.

He helped her lifting the drunk man, both taking a side and balance him with an arm secured over their shoulder. They didn’t talk as they flew up to the bedroom, phasing though one room at a time in silence, while Vlad was mumbling uncomprehending thing under his breath.

Arianna placed him on their huge bed and turned to get to the other side of the bed to turn on the lights, when Vlad suddenly grabbed her like a desperate by the hand and tried pulling her back with a slurring whisper, “please don’t leave me, I'm not going to make it without you.”

“Don’t be silly, Vlad, I’m not going anywhere, “she retorted softly with a gentle smile, “I’m your wife, remember? I will always be here.”

Vlad nodded like a child, clinging to her, “I l-love you all so much.”

Danny stared at him in weird amazement, “is he crying?”

Arianna ignored him in favor of soothing the mess that was her husband, “and we love you, Vlad, now lay down and try relax – Danny, could you get me a bowl and towel?”

Danny went for the stuff and retuned a minute later. He stopped in the door to observe the scene as he returned. Mixed between fascination and distaste.

If he didn’t know his arch enemy in and out, he would never had taken the crying man on the bed to be the same halfa that had handled him down in the living room just three hours earlier. Danny

didn’t know what to do with this Vlad.

The man was so pathetic a sight Danny actually felt regret from yelling at him earlier. He tried pushing those thoughts down, as he gave Arianna the towel and found that it was harder than it should be.

She thanked him quietly before placing the towel beneath Vlad’s side and the bowl on the floor, where Vlad could reach it, if he decided to get rid of some of the liquor in his stomach.

Danny guessed it was time to leave, but stopped dead in track as Vlad turned to him with swimming eyes, “don’t leave me in this hospital, Jack…”

Danny got a lump in his throat. Not sure of what to say or think, he just spoke the first that came to mind, “I won’t.”

Arianna send him a tired smile of gratitude and laid down with the now sleeping man, still with her hand in an iron grip. She watched Danny as he walked to the door and turned off the light.

“Thanks, Danny.”

Danny stopped in the door and just nodded, “it was nothing,” and returned to his room.

He didn’t get much sleep that night.

Chapter 29

Danny found Vlad in the trainings room the next morning.

Well *morning* would probably be sugarcoating it a little. It had long since passed noon, but to a teen that was still early on a Saturday. Vlad hadn't showed up at breakfast and Arianna had informed him that Vlad needed rest.

Danny suspected it was due to the hangover, but didn't dig in it. That seemed to please the female halfa. She had made a toss with her head in Dani's direction when Danny had asked to Vlad.

Made it clear that Dani didn't have to know about the man's pity party last night.

"But he promised to take me out to the movies today," Dani wined, "we're supposed to see Kick-Ass."

Danny was gonna offer to take her, when Arianna beat him to the line, "I know, honey, but Vlad have worked hard and need a break – can you use me instead?"

Dani pursed her lips and eyes coalesced into narrow cracks, putting on her dealer face, "can I have a big popcorn and cola?"

"Do I look like Vlad? You can have butter on the top to."

"Candy by the side?"

"I have a gold card don't I?"

The two females shared a glance of mutual understanding and Dani nodded graciously, "alright, but he's gonna make up for it later."

"Deal," Arianna promised before she grabbed the smaller on and tickled her, to Dani's great amusement and laughter.

Danny rolled his eyes, but couldn't keep himself from smiling to. Seeing Dani like this was one of the little victories he would sacrifice for any time.

“You’re coming, Danny?” Dani panted with a huge grin, but Danny had to decline.

“I have something I have to do – but you two have fun. I’ll come by later if I get a break. Promise.”

“Suit yourself, cuz!” Dani yelled as she ran to her room to get her jacket and phone.

Arianna waited till her daughter was out of hearing reach and turned to the teen, “are you going to talk with Vlad?”

Danny sighed, “I’ll try, okay?”

That seemed to be enough for her and she kissed the crown of his black hair, as she walked to the hall to leave with the babbling Dani. Danny watched as Daisy arrived from the kitchen, duplicated into five and started to remove the leftovers of the breakfast table.

Danny had once tried to help her, only to receive an angry reprimanded about how a master should let her do her job. He kept his hands to himself like a good boy, remembering the smack he had got over his hands last time.

Daisy was such a grandma.

“Hey, Daisy…will ya let me know when Vlad has breakfast?”

The maid let her duplicates do the rest and leaned up against the table with a face in thought, “dat cud be murder,” she began and Danny had long time since learned that she meant “difficult” and not actually manslaughter…sorta.

“If de master sleeps in, yer man 'ill go ter wan av de extra kitchens an' make 'is own breakfast. There’s no tellin' whaen dat wud be. Sometime yer man jist leave de gaff an' eats oyt on a café.”

“Really?” Danny replied a bit confused.

Why would Vlad make his own food or eat out on cafés when he had servant to do all the work for him? The man was such a wierdo, but that explained the little kitchens around the castle…in a way.

How many kitchens did one man need?

“Okay…but if you see him, will you let me know? I’ve to talk to him – but don’t tell him that!” Danny hasted to state.

He didn’t want the man to get his hoped up and it would be better if Danny was the one to go to him – not the other way around.

“If yer insist, master Danny…if it’s not naggin' too much, chucker yer tell waaat 'appened last noight? Oi had ter call workers ter git de walls fixed an' de store ter git new furniture.”

Danny played with his food, but lost the distraction as one of the duplicates snatched it from him. He sighed, not meeting her eyes. They really had to call workers to fix the walls? Damn.

“We had a fight…well it turned into more than a fight, I think? Not sure. I guess the best would be to seek him out and talk some things trough. Ya know? Not that I’m apologizing or anything!”

Daisy just hummed knowingly and watched him as he left to find a way to kill some time. He didn’t hear the little maid run back to the kitchen where the rest of the staff was hiding. Waiting for some juicy gossip.

Danny found a hand poking through the wall two hours later and the grave cook beckoned for him to follow.

The brute ghost stopped beside the door to the training room and Danny gave him a “thanks man” which just got a nod in return. Danny shook his head and walked into the room’s control room.

He suppressed his core just in case Vlad was still mad at him and watched from the bullet and ghost blast proofed glass down into the training room.

Plasmius was walked down at the wide white room and apparently working though some simulation that looked like falling rain. Danny watched him wandered around in the ankle-deep water, moving his hands is soft movement.

Almost moving to a soundless tone while thick water drops poured

down on him. Danny squinted and turned to the zoomed screens in the control room.

What was Vlad doing?

He got his question answered the second after. The heavy raindrops all stopped at the same time, hanging weightless in the air and Danny almost expected the Master of Time popping in with a *"TIME OUT!"*

But the only thing frozen in place was the raindrops, hanging still in the air and faintly buzzing like they were in an old Black n' White movie. But instead of turning white or black, they turned red.

Danny gasped as all the raindrops sparkled with electricity and turned long and sharp.

All pointing to a single target board on the southern wall. Danny had sent some of his own most powerful blasts at those boards, but where he had only made a little damage on the energy absorbing plates, Vlad's raindrop needles penetrated the entire board.

Danny thought that was is, when the whole thing exploded by the sheer force of electricity and turned the board into a pile of ash. The water fell to the ground and showered Vlad a second bath.

The man ignored it, just observing the spot where the target board had been a second ago and frowned in something that looked like frustration. Danny hid as the man turned his way.

"Return to standard room and target voltage strength. Test 89," Vlad said and his voice echoed in the control room with its pompous baritone.

Danny peaked up to see if Vlad had turned back again, found that he hadn't and watched as the man hovered in the air, turning intangible to let the water soaking his cloths and hair join the rest that was sluiced down little drains in the floor.

Little sprinklers dried the room in a second and the rest of the target boards disappeared back into the walls. Vlad landed in the now stark white room and the room's female robotic speaker broke the silence.

"Initiate test 89. Current Voltage strength – 0."

Danny wondered briefly when the voice of his mother had been replaced with this unipersonal dull speaker, when Vlad duplicated and regained the teen's fully attention again.

The two Plasmius backed away in each direction, making space between them, before the original Vlad made an electric ball in his palm.

Danny wondered if Vlad was gonna train that explosive ball trick he had taught Danny back at the arena, but instead of keeping the ball and shrink it, Vlad threw it to his duplicate.

Instead of dodging the ball of doom or at least move out of the way, the duplicate let his hands flare and…. grabbed it.

Danny almost smacked his nose against the glass, when he jumped closer to get a better look. Was Vlad seriously playing ball with a duplicate? A ball of electric ecto-energy!? How was that even possible?

The two Plasmius flew around to pep up the game and made new ways to throw the ball that looked impossible to catch, but for every time the ball was caught the computer counted and informed the voltage strength.

"123. Voltage Strength: 5060."

Vlad made a neck breaking jump to catch the ball, but lost it by a millimeter and the ball exploded as it hit the wall. A thick wave of red sparks and blue fire spread over the wall like water and consumed the entire room.

Danny stepped back from the glass in reflex, but the glass surface held.

Vlad stood still by the wall, letting the waved of fire and electricity run over him like a second skin, not seeming to feel a thing. Danny heard him sigh in the control rooms speakers, *"ad new record to files and close training session 'Plasmius'."*

"'Plasmius' saved. Closing training room."

Danny jumped when Vlad teleported and hurried to phase out the control room – but unfortunate not fast enough as Vlad appeared next to him.

Danny was ready to get sneered at, but all Vlad did was look at him with a tired face, “its rude to spy, Daniel.”

Danny though Vlad would follow that up with something more, but the halfa just turned his back on him and pressed a few buttons on the panel, before leaving through the wall.

Danny blinked perplex as the lights turned off and he was alone in the dark.

What just happened?

He found Vlad in his human form back at the hallway and opened his mouth…but what was he supposed to say? Vlad ignored him completely and started walking with his back to the teen. Danny frowned.

Was the man seriously ignoring him? *Him?* The boy he wanted as a son and evil apprentice? Danny fucking Fenton?

Not on Danny’s watch.

Danny just flew after him like some disturbing shadow, not knowing what to do. Vlad had never ignored him before – that was usual Danny’s role.

Don’t get him wrong, normally he would be more than thankful to be ignored by the man, it was actually a dream come true. How many times hadn’t he wished for the man to leave him alone and just get out of his face?

But this was all wrong. And Danny was part of the wrong in this case. Danny sighed and followed Vlad into one of the private kitchens. It was actually a nice kitchen, small, but comfy and surprisingly well stocked with food.

One of the wall was completely made of glass and showed the garden outside, which gave a fresh hue to the white counters and furniture

and if that wasn't enough green, then the indoor plants and pots with different species would do the trick. Filing the place with a calming aroma.

Danny stood awkward by the little table, while Vlad had moved to the stove area. Pulling out different ingredients from the fridge and collecting the bowls and pots he needed from the cabins.

Danny landed on the warm tiles and turned human in the lack of better things to do. Vlad kept ignoring him and Danny cleared his throat, "uhm…Vlad –"

"Hand me two of the apples by the basket, please."

Danny turned around and found a basket with fruit on the table. He handed them to the halfa and ended up next to Vlad, watching him pouring flower, sugar, buttermilk, salt, baking soda and vanilla extract into a bowl along with two eggs and started beaten it with a whisk.

The man's eyes were on the bowl, "have you had lunch?"

Danny was still jumpy and almost knocked the milk of the counter, "uhmm…no?"

"Then start peeling the apples," Vlad said without taking his eyes of the pan he was adding sun flower oil.

Danny frowned, but did as he was told and started pealing the apples over the sink. They stayed silent while the pan sizzled and Vlad overtook the apples.

Danny watched as Vlad grated the apples over the bowl and stirred it with the rest of his ingredients, just watched him, no talking at all. Vlad started making small buns on the pan with a spoon and Danny felt his teeth water by the smell.

It reminded him of pancakes or maybe French toast, but nothing he had ever seen before or heard of. They were looking like pancakes but thicker and looked way crispier.

What was Vlad's deal again?

Vlad ignored his questioning expression in favor of handing him two plates from the cabins and Danny made the table without a word.

They stayed that way, till they were seated and Vlad serve him a plate of five pieces, decorated with powdered sugar and fresh berries.

Danny took a bite and hummed, “wow, they’re good – what is it?”

“Oladi, a Russian type of pancakes,” Vlad replied aloof and started cutting his own ones.

Danny took one more, he wasn’t surprised Vlad could cook (he had made the man his personal chef back at the Vortex incident – maybe not the best memory right now…) but he never suspected Vlad to be cultural like that.

Everything Vlad did was so American. The Packers. The Amani suits. His accent.

Funny Danny had to move in with him to discover this Russian side of him. Danny remembered why he was here in the first place and felt a little weird again. Should he risk anger Vlad during a meal the man had made personal for him? Hmmm….

Danny swallowed two oladis, just in case Vlad would flip the table or something and flushed it down with the juice Vlad had given him, before talking.

“Vlad, about last night –”

“I know you have no intention of making an apology, so just eat your lunch, Daniel,” Vlad cut him off and took a sip of his coffee.

Danny scowled, “good. ‘Couse I’m not.”

They returned to the silence and Danny felt his appetite disappear. He had no idea what he had expected to happen here. He wasn’t gonna say he was sorry for something he wasn’t, but then what? Yelling at Vlad or ask about his hang over?

Danny wasn’t that much of a brat, but even he had to admit he had acted as one. He recalled the last two weeks and how he had taken

every opportunity to be downright nasty to the man.

Hell, had it been him, he would probably had kicked himself out long time ago – not serving delicious breakfast like this. Tucker and Sam might approve of his behavior, but Danny wasn't sure he liked the image he was turning himself into anymore.

"Arianna took Dani to the cinema in your place."

"I'm aware," Vlad replied and leaned back in the chair with his coffee cup, "I will have to find a way to make it good again when they return. Can't break promises like that to my own daughter."

Danny snorted, "wow, really living the family dream here, aren't we?"

Vlad ignored his sarcastic tone and served himself more coffee, "why living a dream, when you have the real thing? Unless you have forgotten, Daniel, I'm married and have a child now. Maybe we should have that short time memory of yours checked. It seemed to get worse."

The teen just rolled his eyes, ditching the utensils and just eating with his hands. He knew Vlad hated that, "hey I'm not the one forgetting keeping promises to my daughter. You must be a real catch – and speaking of Russian pancakes, have you even presented your wife to your mom? She's the Russian one in the family, right? I bet she's a racist or something. Probably of the worst mother-in-law a girl can get. It's either her or your father you get your evil nature from."

Vlad stopped the cup in mid movement, before returned to normal again.

Acting as nothing, "actually, I think my mother would have liked her. If she were still alive, I'm sure she would be talking nonstop about grandchildren right now."

Danny froze and felt like biting is tongue of. Wow, was he the worst or what?

"Vlad, I'm sorry, I didn't –"

Vlad cut him off for the third time, but didn't sound cold or dismissive this time, "Daniel, it's quit all right. It was ages ago and I'm over it. You don't have to say anything, but I appreciate the apology."

Vlad sounded a little to smock at the end, but Danny didn't feel like going back to being nasty anymore. He looked down at his plate, "and your father?"

Vlad leaned back in the seat with a hum, "Harold Masters. He passed due to old age twenty years ago, a quit peacefully way to go. He simple slept in. He was the successor of the Dairy king; I think you two have meet."

Danny almost choked in laughter, "the dairy king is a fruitloop?"

Vlad gave him a warning look, but let it slide, "he is my grandfather, yes. He's very pleased to see the castle filled with a Masters heir. That seems to be the only thing we can talk about these days. He has showed himself more now than in the forty years I have lived here."

Danny served the man coffee and took another oladi, "so what? Your mother was one of those young models' rich men pick up when they get old and bored?"

Danny imagined an old amarican man with his arm around his third marriage, twenty-three-year-old trophy wife.

"Oh, no, she was actually a year older than my father," Vlad clarified calmly, "they meet through my father's dairy trade in Russia. She moved to the states with him and named me after her father. Vladimir Vashchenko. His dairy farms are still the biggest dairy company in Russia and sometime competes with my own brands."

Danny crocked an eyebrow, "so they got kids late in life or something?"

"Kid," Vlad corrected him, "I was unexpected, but very welcome in their life. My father died just before I was accepted to college, but my mother lived long enough to receive a phone call. She had a stroke when she was told I had been hospitalized. I found out after I return

from the coma, the doctors and I decided to turn her off ten years ago."

Vlad was staring at nothing in particular, lost in thought, but strangely serene.

"I'm sorry, Vlad."

The man turned back to the present and him with those calm midnight eyes of his and gave the teen a slight smile, so unlike his usual jeering smile or arrogant smirk.

"Don't be, Daniel, I have my own family now. I'm sure they would have been happy for me."

They returned to their plates, but Danny found that the silence between them had turned from the tense kind to a more comforting one.

He could always come with a rude reply and send them back to square 1, by making Vlad angry, but the teen had the strange feeling that they had reached a point in their relationship he couldn't change or return to its former glory. And maybe…that was okay.

Danny had had enough of fighting and something could seem that Vlad to, had reached his limit. They cleaned the plates together and not a single word was spoken, but during the simple act of Vlad washing and Danny drying the plates, something more than words filled the kitchen.

-

Arianna followed her adopted daughter up the stairs to the castle with a giggle.

Dani had fallen hard for the movie and talked nonstop about it the entire ride, almost to busy talking to focus on not floating up the stairs without hitting one of the giant stone pots by the door.

The woman couldn't do anything than love the little teen with her extrovert personality and fast talking and steered her away from one of the plants.

“ – and the way Hit-Girl just took out the entire building by herself? The hallway scene was the best. That was rad – did you see the way she loaded her guns in the air!?”

“Are you kidding? That was the best scene,” Arianna grinned and opened the door for the younger female, “your kind of a Hit-Girl yourself.”

“That would make dad Big-Daddy,” Dani grinned and suddenly got a laughing fit, “and Danny Kick-Ass!”

Daisy received them in the hall and took their jackets before closing the door without a word. Arianna looked around, “Daisy have you by chance seen Danny or Vlad today?”

The little maid fidget with her apron apprehensively, “aye, they seemed ter be on better terms now…”

Both halfas shared a glance and Arianna put up a smile, “well…that’s nice to hear, have they been hanging out the entire day?”

The maid nodded and keep giving the dining hall frightened glances, “ah yes…they 'av been trainin' together an' talking….”

“Daisy…are you okay?” Arianna asked gentle, but the ghost looked jumpy nonetheless.

“Naw i’m not! They in de kitchen! De two masters are in me kitchen!”

“What?” Dani blurted confused and followed the two females to the dining room.

Both halfas pinched their noses when the reeking smell of something burning reached them. Black smoke was spilling out from under the two kitchen doors and muffled voiced could be heard Daisy squealed and ran through the doors, with the two halfas not far behind.

“Daniel! I said 200 degrees to half an hour!”

“No! You said 200 degrees per hour! You never said I was supposed to stay under 200 degree! You told me to do math, so I did! If you

give it twice the heat, it should be finish by half the time!"

"Giving it 500 degrees won't make it done in half time!"

"How the hell was I supposed to know!?"

"Ahem…" Arianna voiced sternly.

Danny and Vlad both turned around like startled animals when they realized they had company.

Vlad was the first to get hold of himself and tried getting his smoking apron to look more presentable, "ladies, how nice of you to join us… how was the movie?"

"Are you two cooking or trying to burn the place down and gas us out?" Dani asked straightforward and the two males shared a look, before Vlad pointed accusingly at Danny.

"He set the oven to 500, who in their right mind does that?"

Danny scoffed indignant, "hey! You're the one who asked if we should cook! You have spied on me enough to know that's suicide!"

"THE DINNER!" Daisy screamed and was seconds away from opening the oven and release its horrors, when the cook stopped her. The big ghost just shook his head in downright fear. Both ghosts returned to the corner he had been sitting in and started rocking traumatized.

"Me kitchen…" Daisy whispered.

Arianna and Dani took in the sight of the complete chaos that was the Masters grand kitchen.

No surface had survived the food bomb that appeared to have exploded in there and burned spots competed for the territory with the sticky and unidentifiable liquors on the floor and ceiling.

Arianna wrinkled her nose when a certain smell reached her. She lifted her foot and found it sticking to a green texture and sighed, "you guys tried using death blossoms in your cooking?"

This time it was Danny's turn to point at Vlad and the man send him a nasty look, "that was an honest mistake – who could have known it was explosive under heat and bring food to life?"

The oven growled in reply.

"Well, whatever you two duffus have in that oven, I'm not ready to risk my half-life for it. Can we just order a pizza?" Dani asked and her parents shared a look.

Danny rose his own mitten, "can I have a Hawaii?"

The oven burst open and the roar from its inside became more insistent. Arianna pulled her phone from her purse with a tired sigh, while the others tried getting some control over the black tar that was beginning to leak from the oven.

The Pizza houses picked up a second later and Arianna moved her head to avoid one of the flying pans coming her way.

"Yes, hallo. This is the stable and functional Masters family, where nothing can go wrong, "Arianna said a little beside herself, as the tar doubled in amount and tried to swallow Danny's entire arm.

Vlad gave it a beating with a cooking pan, while Dani yelled encouragements. The two servants watched from their hiding spot with wide eyes, as Vlad and Danny's cooked bastard monster took up the fight with the three halfas.

"I like to order four family pizzas. Three Hawaii and one meat-lover, please…no I'm not upset, I'm fine. Just take the order before I vomit into the phone. No, not sick, just pregnant."

Every person in the room turned to the woman in each state of surprise and/or horror. Even the tar monster looked a little baffled.

"YOU'RE *WHAT!?"*

Chapter 30

Maddie Fenton was in the middle of her second experiment, when her husband stuck his head into the lab.

“Maddie! Phone!”

“WHAT?” she yelled back, trying to outshout the screaming ectopus she was dissecting on the steal table, without any anesthetic (she had run out of that and didn’t have time for Ghost-Resources and their rules.

Who the hell made protection committees for ghosts anyway?).

“PHONE!” he yelled back and Maddie knocked the ghost out to get some quiet.

“WHAT!?”

“PHONE FOR YOU!” he yelled before realizing she could hear him now and whispered, “it’s from Wisconsin.”

The woman rolled her eyes. Really Vlad?

She had though he had moved on by now, but apparently old habits was hard to quit. She inhaled slowly and planted her scalpel a little deeper in the ghost than necessary.

I always started like this. The man would turn up unexpected, flirt shamelessly and then just disappearing for a couple of months again, before suddenly show up or call them. She really had hoped he had grown up by now.

When he had turned up unexpended two and a half year ago, he had seemed changed, matured even. He didn’t even flirt with her anymore. He had acted kindly around her up to the wedding and actually made her believe he had moved on from her…but now he was calling her again.

She told herself it didn’t had to be because he wanted to see her like some lost poppy. It could be Danny…but he had called them over his

own phone yesterday, not the house phone.

She sighed when her husband kept creeping closer like some obscure ninja, all serous and stealthy trying to sneak the phone up to her ear.

She batted it away, “tell Vlad I’m busy, hon. Talk about the packers or something, that usual works.”

“It’s not V-man,” Jack whispered and watched the phone like it was a ticking bomb, “its Arianna, she’s all weird and moody.”

“What?”

Jack just placed the phone slowly on the counter and backed away from it, like it would jump him if he showed open fear or turned his back on it.

He reached the stairs and ran like the devil was in his heels, “ALL YOURS! REMEMBER I LOVE YOU!”

Maddie pulled her goggles and hazmat hood down with a frown. Why was the woman calling her? They had talked at the bachelorette party, yes, but that had been it. She had shared more words with Vlad and she had been actively trying to avoid him as much as possible.

“Maddie speaking.”

“Mrs. Fenton?”

The ghost huntress blinked perplex over the others thick voice and suppressed hiccups. She moved the phone to the other ear with a frown, “Arianna is that you?”

“Yeah…” the woman whined and sounded like she was blowing her nose.

Alarms got off in Maddie’s head and she forgot all about her experiment and the awakening ectopus.

“Arianna what’s wrong, why are you crying, sweety?” she suddenly got a bad feeling and reached for her Fenton-creep-stick out of habit,

“is it Vlad? – what have he done?”

How typical! The man had one job and that was to take care of woman and daughter. This woman had practical sacrificed ten of her best years for him! If he had hurt the little sweet woman, then –

“No its not Vlad…well it was him in a way…hehe.”

Maddie frowned as the other started giggling in an alarming mix of humor and sobs. Something was way off here and Maddie wasn’t sure what to make of it.

“Sorry, I’m all over the place right now,” Arianna said and cleared her throat, *“it didn’t want to scare you or whine on the phone like this. I have never been like this before, it’s so embarrassing. I’m sorry, but I didn’t know who else to call about this. All my friends are still just dating and I have never had the talk with my mother about these things…”*

A little light bulb suddenly turned on in Maddie’s head and she sighed in relief. She knew what this was about now. Of course! The mood swings…Vlad’s part in it…no one to turn to…the insecurity…

“What trimester, sweety?”

“First one…three weeks in,” Arianna retorted with a sniff and the older woman smiled.

“Have you told Vlad?”

“Yes,” she said and suddenly sounded a lot better, *“he’s so happy, Maddie, you should see him. He’s insisting on bringing me breakfast on the bed now and forces me to walk slowly so I won’t restrain myself. He’s so annoying and sweet and…god, so clingy!”*

Maddie knew what she meant, “Jack was the same when I was having Jazz. She’s my oldest, you meet her at the wedding, right? When I reached second trimester he insisted on taking to my belly and drawing faces on it, it was so irritating, but he got better. He almost stopped getting anxious on my behalf and inventing ghost protecting devises for babies, when we had Danny. By the way, have you told him?”

The other hummed, *“he’s such a sweet boy. Don’t worry, the baby won’t get in the way for his studies, I promise.”*

Jack peaked up from the kitchen as Maddie walked up from the basement. She made a calming gesture to him, but the man just narrowed his eyes before sliding slowly back into the kitchen. Clearly not trusting her and the phone one second.

“I’m sure that won’t be a problem. I’m more than happy to help you, how about you and Vlad come to Amity with Danny and Dani and we get a good talk, what do you say?”

“Really? That would be perfect, thank you Mrs. Fenton.”

“Call me Maddie, dear, everyone does that. Call me when you be around, bye bye!”

Jack looked up from the other side of the chair, when his wife hung the phone back on the wall, “what was it? Possessed? Cancer? PSM? Flue?....ghost flue? Ghost PSM, maybe?”

“Try pregnancy,” Maddie corrected with a beaming smile, “get ready to become an uncle, Jack. There’s a little one on the way!”

Jack lighted up, “I get the Fenton-child-started-kit!”

“And I get the baby albums!” she yelled.

They exchanged a high five before running in each direction. Back at the lab, the ectopus had gotten out of its restraints, took one look at the Fenton Portal and ran back to the Ghost Zone.

Skulker watched it leave and let it pass him and his team of ghost mercenaries. The hunter checked his display on his arm and found that it was time for his shift, “I be back in five hours. Plasmius called me.”

The one-eyed ghost next to him took his spot with a grunt, “what did he want?”

“Rapport,” Skulker lied and flew for the Masters Portal. If he had understood any of the ramble his employer had said on the phone,

the halfa wanted to celebrate something.

Better bring a bottle then.

-

Danny watched as the limo drove past the gates to the airport and left the open land in exchange for the well-known sign by the road.

Welcome to Amity park.

Danny sighed in excitement. Even the missing corner of the sign was sign that he was really returning home. He remembered breaking it of when he fought Skulker and was in a way happy that the town haven't had it fixed yet.

His touch on the town wasn't completely gone. This was still Phantom's territory.

"Excited?" Vlad asked next to him without taking his eyes of his book.

Danny turned back to him and rolled his eyes by the book cover. *Pregnancy and all that can go wrong – be prepared!*

"Seriously, Vlad? How many of those guides do you have? You know she's the one that's pregnant and not you, right? You're not a seahorse…wait...halfas aren't not like that, right?"

"I can hear you," Arianna mumbled from the three seats she was lying down on with an annoyed scowl on her face.

Vlad pressed her down gentle, but forcefully when she tried sitting up, "no, no, the book said you had to lay down if you got car sick, dear, need more pillows?"

"No, I need my dignity back – and my free right to chocolate and jerky, your food Nazi."

Dani snorted behind her Gameboy and Vlad shook his head, "it's just the mood swings talking, you be fine in a week or two when you gotten use to the diet schedule. You wouldn't be talking like this, if

you had just taken the pills I assigned you, dear."

She sent him a nasty look and whispered, "*make me.*"

Danny grinned down into his milkshake. Arianna had been forced to go through a couple of test in Vlad's infirmary ever since he found out she was pregnant and talked nonstop about diets, special treatments for ghost children and pregnancy percussions.

Vlad had all but strapped her to the bed, feed her five different kind of medications, followed her around like her personal clingy shadow, reading up from book about all the stuff that could go wrong while in labor.

It had only been a week and the man had already started making insane safety percussions, like a new elevator in the house to keep her from taking the stairs and placed rubber dots on all sharp edges in the castle.

He had even taken over Danny and Dani's training and cancelled all Arianna's appointment, so she wouldn't have to leave the castle. The woman had lost it when he forbidden her to go ghost – for nine months.

No wonder she had called for backup.

Vlad had been furious when he found out she had snitched to Danny's mother and he had called Maddie to inform that he under no circumstances would allow his wife to take a plane to Amity.

Danny could have told him it was pointless (if not dangerous) to challenge his mother, when it came to another female or child in need. Vlad had lost the fight before it had even started and all but destroyed the phone in fury.

He had end up given in, but demanded that Arianna promised to stay human and not leaving his supervisor under the entire visit.

The two phantoms had watched the drama with high interest and looked forward to seeing their friends and girlfriends again. Talking to the gang over skype was fine, but the real deal was to be favored.

Plus, Danny would get to see his territory and home again. He couldn't wait.

-

Both he, Dani and Arianna peaked up, when the limo came to a full stop and the huge sign of Fenton-Works shone down on them.

Danny and Dani jumped out first and ran to the door, while Vlad insisted on moving his wife one millimeter at a time.

"Let me out of the car, Vlad!"

"Wait, you risk bumping into the door, don't move…alright one foot at a time."

Danny deadpanned next to the snickering Dani. Arianna phased her way through the car and tried pushing past Vlad, but he was faster and carried her bridal style to the stairs.

Danny rang the doorbell and heard his father's loud footsteps before the actual man opened the door with a wide smile.

"Danny!"

"Dad!" Danny jumped in to the bear hug and grinned when Dani was taking in on the other arm.

Jack was ready to give Vlad and Arianna the same welcome, when Vlad threw himself in front of his wife like a living shield and took the bone crushing hug with a pained groan.

"Jack, you're smothering him," Maddie warned happily from the door and took her son in for a hug, "oh, look at you, Danny. You're getting taller than me now."

"Really?" Danny asked jokingly, "that's not much."

Danny grinned when his mother pinched him warningly with a smile and turned to Dani, "hey Dani, remember me? I was at the wedding, when your parents got married. We looked forward to see you again, Valerie is waiting in the living room if you –"

Dani was already speeding past her and his mother shook her head, before turning to Danny, “Tucker and Sam is in the kitchen, go say hey, sweety.”

Danny walked to the kitchen as Maddie greeted Vlad and discreetly helped Arianna escape out of his clingy claws, and back to needed freedom.

He found both his friends with their backs to him in the kitchen, where they were working at the counters.

“– I don’t know, Tucker. He sounded weird last night, you know? More at ease than I have seen him in weeks. He even looked like had actually slept.”

“Sam, ma’ man, one word – money.”

“What?”

“Money!” the geek persisted and came mayo all over the celling as he rose his hand with the butter knife for emphasis, “it’s scientific proven that being close to dollar bills over a longer span of time, makes people relax and slow down. It’s the chemicals, Sam, like pot! The chemicals in those green paper pieced is like pheromone for humans. It goes faster if you smoke them. Even the sight of a full bank-account on a screen will make the human brain lower its blood pressure and tone down stress.”

“You’re crazy, Tuck. I’m loaded and you don’t see me relax in my enemy’s home,” Sam replied and didn’t notice as her boyfriend sneaked up behind her.

“Oh year?” Tucker replied and pointed to her boots, “then what do you call those socks on your feet? What kind of goth wears cozy socks, Sam? You’re a disgrace to the underworld community.”

“When the fuck has you seen me without boots on!?” Sam retorted miffed and screamed as Danny grabbed her from behind.

“And they match her underwear!” he laughed and kissed her neck.

“Danny!” Sam cried out in surprise and embarrassment. Danny swung

her a turn in the kitchen to Tucker's great amusement and Sam's protest.

"I've missed you guys!" Danny grinned happily and dragged Tucker in on the group hug to.

"Dude, it's been like – ages or something!" Tucker grinned and touched his face, "out of the screen and everything. Such high-quality filter, looks so real. That's 5D for you right here."

Sam gave him the sandwich they had been making and kissed him now that said screen wasn't between them, "you always get hungry after a flight, so we made you this – do they even feed you in that castle?"

They all jumped in surprise when a black shade shot up from the kitchen floor, hasted to the snack cabin and started looting it for jerky.

The three teens watched in silence as the shade ate up every last package of Fenton-jerky (wrapper and everything), before grabbing a box of raw fudge and his dad's new emergencies ham from the fridge.

The shade returned to the floor from where it came and left the empty cabins behind.

Danny took a sip of his milkshake, "Vlad have forced Arianna on a special baby diet. She's going to eat him if he keeps starving her like that; I give it two months' tops."

"Wild," Tucker said and suddenly gave him an inspecting look, "is that…one those ecto-smoothies you told us about?"

"Danny, no!" Sam yelled and tried knocking it out of his hand, but Danny was faster and turned it intangible, "hey! It's just a milkshake!"

Tucker and Sam seemed to calm down and Tucker dried his forehead for sweat, "phew, for a moment there I was afraid you had taken the brainwashing dope. You sure it's just a milkshake?"

Danny nodded, "yep, kiwi fudge with chess pops and bacon taste –

want one?"

Sam made a gagging sound, "ew, no – I'm not kissing you again before you've used mouthwash."

She tilted her head with a raised eyebrow, "Danny…why is there a big 'V' on the cup?"

Danny sipped the last of his milkshake calmly, "it's from the limo's minibar and I swear, all the stuff got his signature on it, even the ice cubes. Vlad made it on the way from the airport, he's actually pretty good at it. He makes a mean sundae to."

Tucker stuck a finger in his ear as if to clear it, "I'm sure I didn't get that right. You took handmade food – willingly – from Vlad?"

Danny just shrugged. Tucker gave him an odd look and Sam eyed the empty cup like it was contagious.

Both the geek and the goth share a look before moving on like nothing had happened, "anyway… what was that about Vlad getting all hammered and shitfaced? Come on, Danny, more details!"

"Yeah," Tucker joined in as they moved to the living room, "spill the slander, man – did he really start crying? Never though Plasmius for a depressed drinker. We should start call him Cry-mius."

"Okay, okay!" Danny hissed and shushed them down, "I'll tell you everything later, but please don't mentioned it to anyone else or in front of Vlad. Promise?"

Sam frowned, "why? It's good blackmail material."

"Just don't, he and I talked about it and we're over it, okay?" Danny said and led them into the living room, where the rest of the house had assembled.

Behind him, Tucker and Sam shared a confused look.

"Sam…did he just…defend Vlad?"

"And they…*talked?"*

Dani and Valerie was both looking rather annoyed on the couch. Vlad had forced them apart by placing himself and Jack in-between them. Arianna was guarded by Maddie and was eating her way through a pack of Ben&Jerrys with bacon crumble on top.

The Fenton matriarch sent the billionaire a humored grin as he eyed the dessert with distaste, “it’s my house, Vlad. No pregnant woman is starving here.”

“Do you know how many toxins there is in chocolate, Maddie? That bacon is made from medical drugged pigs – it’s bad for the baby!” he sneered and reached to snatching the ice-cream.

Arianna tugging it back, “no!”

Maddie tried forcing his hands of and Jack looked worried from one to another, “V-man, it’s just ice-cream.”

“I’m her husband and I say no!”

“I need it!” Arianna hissed and seemed to win the tugging fight, “*I have a craving!”*

“Yesh,” Tucker whispered, “pregnant women are scary. Is it really all just hormones? Like PSM?”

“Watch where you step now,” Sam warned him, “I may be your friend, but I’m still female.”

“Is that why your cozy socks are red today? Because you on your…”

Jazz arrived in the door and jumped into the living room with a confetti handgun, “congratulation with the baby! It’s such a huge step for a family and psychology it’s –”

Vlad and Arianna looked up from their tugging fight halfway over the couch and armchair, where Jack and Maddie had taken each Master and tried getting them away from each other with force.

Dani and Valerie peaked up from their hideout under the coffee table and Danny was stuck in-between the fighting Sam and Tucker, that had both grabbed the others hair.

Jazz gave the living room and its frozen individuals a raised eyebrow, “we are celebrating, aren’t we?”

No one answered and Jazz exhaled with a scowl, put on her reading glasses and with notepad in hand, she pointed strictly at the kitchen door, “alright, everyone over twenty goes to the kitchen for group therapy, this instant.”

Vlad cleared his throat, “Jasmine, that’s really not –”

“Move it!”

The Master and Fenton couple moved hastily to the kitchen like dogs with their tails between their legs and was followed close behind by Jazz.

She turned around before closing the door, “and you five – don’t leave the house – you have a group session in forty-five minutes, so stay put!”

The teens jumped as she slammed the door. Danny gave the others a look, “wanna run while we still have our minds free of Jazz’s fingerprints and go to the arcade?”

They were out of the house in just forty-five seconds later and ran like hell down the street. Sullivan was polishing the limos mirrors and looked after the, “hey, where’s fire?”

“The kitchen!” Danny yelled after him, “save yourself! See you later!”

Sam ran up on his side, “you best palls with the ghost driver to!?”

Danny rolled his eyes and turned down the street in high speed with the others, as they crossed the street and almost got run down by a truck.

“He’s a decent guy when you get use to his weird info speaking on the intercom. I was talking with him and the rest of the staff –”

Tucker took his other side, “you hang out with Vlad’s servant to?”

Danny stopped up outside the arcade with the others and panted hard

after the sprint, “what…do…you…mean… by ‘to’?”

Sam got her breath back first and turned to the youngest Phantom, “hey, Dani – are Vlad and Danny pals now or something?”

Danny realized what was happening and made hand gesture behind Sam’s back to make Dani shut up. Valerie deadpanned. Dani on the other hand squinted, not sure what her cousin was trying to tell her (slashing hand over your neck and Jazz-hands…was that code for tell everything or nothing? Probably the first.)

“Does pals mean you train and fuck up my dinner together? Cause then they defiantly besties.”

“I knew it! Danny, what the hell!?”

The teen just shrugged, “what? You expected me to stay enemies with him after living with him for three weeks and after everything we’ve been through?”

“YES!” Tucker and Sam cried out. Valerie nodded a bit and Dani rolled her eyes at them.

“If you guys insist on judging my dad, at least do it behind my back, okay?”

“Your dad is fruitloop,” Valerie told her severely, but sensitively, “I only tolerate him, because he’s your fruitloop.”

“Aww!” Dani cooed and gave her a kiss.

Danny deadpanned and ignored the two lovebirds, “okay,” he started, “I’m not saying me and Vlad is besties or something, but…we just kind of both grown tired of the villain and hero thing, okay?”

Sam and Tucker crossed their arms. Not looking convinced one bit.

Danny sighed, he had been afraid this would happen. Vlad haven’t changed to a complete ‘good-guy’ per se, but Danny had decided to give him a chance for a change. Vlad had actually made an effort to befriend him, why not return the favor?

Vlad wasn't the first guy he had given a second chance after all.

"He's still a villain in my system," Tucker informed and showed Danny his PDA, "look! Right there under Phantom enemies – you placed him there yourself! You filled out the profile, you even took his mugshots. You made a statement, dude."

"I know," Danny groaned annoyed and pushed the PDA down to look at his girlfriend, "Sam, come on, trust me on this. If I respect him in a way, so can you guys. What does he have to do to prove himself to you?"

Sam rolled her eyes, "the only thing I respect about that cheesehead is Arianna…. her and maybe the Knitting-Vlad we split from Plasmius those years ago."

She suddenly looked like she got an idea and drummed her cheek in thought, "you know…. if he's such a nice guy as you say, then his ghost side should have changed to, right? If we split him again with the Fenton Ghost Catcher and Plasmius turned out to be good…"

"NO," Danny stated hard and she sighed.

"Fine. Let's just rage against the machine or whatever."

She looked after him as he entered the arcade with Valeri and Dani, and made eye contact with Tucker. Both smiled sinisterly.

"If the split Plasmius turn out to be evil – which he is," Sam said slowly, "we will have Vlad exposed for good. I even think Arianna will thank us when Vlad she sees human Vlad."

"And the two Phantoms back in the team where they belong," Tucker added.

The geek and goth made fist bump and walked into the arcade. Making plans in the cheap disco light and flashing neon light.

Chapter 31

The teens returned to Fenton-Works right before dinner and found the Masters and Fenton couple seated in the kitchen.

All of them seemed to be in a huge discussion, even Jack, who normally didn't rose his voice in dialog unless there was a laughing matter or a ghost to threaten.

Tucker put up a concerned face as he saw how Danny stopped in mid step as his father's voice reached the teens first.

"I'm just saying that if we re-assembled together as a team like back in college, that darn spoke to Phantom would be on our dissection table before sundown."

Danny's full stop made the rest of them come to a halt and they shared a worried look. None of the grownups seemed to have discovered their teen audience and Danny just stood by the half-closed door.

Listening with an unreadable face.

"Or, or, *or*," Arianna interrupted annoyed, "you could just NOT do that and leave the ghost alone – as far I've heard, he's a hero and actually saves people. He's a good kid – what have he done to you?"

"He's a ghost, hon," Maddie said patronizing, "Danny Phantom is not saving people by fighting other ghosts, he's only making the ghost infestation worse – he's the reason they're here in the first place. Ghost fight each other for territory and he draws dangerous specters like flies to honey."

Danny clenched his hands to hard fists and Sam placed her hand on his back, but he didn't seem to notice.

"We would all be far better off with him under examination down in the lab," Jack continued, "think about what we could learn from him. I bet that ghost kid is driven by the same ectoplasmic biology as those other specimens me and Mads caught in the portal."

“You guys promised not to do that anymore,” Jazz grumbled and placed something hard enough on the table in the kitchen, to make several china cups chatter.

Tucker’s money was on a teapot – his nose never failed him when it came to food and beverages.

Jazz’s voice turned suspicions as she took a seat, “is that why the lab is so spot clean? Dad, have you and mom been dissecting a ghost down there again?”

“It was just an ectopus, sweety,” Maddie retorted calmly, “me and your father are ghost hunters, it’s part of our job to find out what makes these specters tick in order to stop them.”

Arianna scoffed, “maybe the reason these ghosts come here is because of your portal – that’s where ghost come from, is it not? If someone was dissecting and caging my species, if think I would come attack their city to. Just saying.”

“Trust me on this one, Arianna,” Jack warned gravely, “none of us is safe before we got Phantom under key and lock – we even got a cage with his name on it for when we catch him, its right next to the one for The Wisconsin ghost and Three-eyed shady. You know, the female ghost that used to haunt the town a year ago.”

“Nightshade, her name was Nightshade,” Arianna corrected discreetly, “and his name is Plasmius, hate those name the media comes up with.”

“Yeah, no need for hunting Three-eyed shady right now!” Jazz laughed forced and a little hysterical, “you guys should defiantly not waste your time trying to shoot her down from the sky or open her up! Nope, not an important or threatening ghost!”

“Hey!”

“Not now, dear,” Vlad whispered and got Maddie’s attention.

“No matter their silly names, we could still use your help, Vlad. You have fought the Wisconsin ghost more than once and I’ve seen your collection of ghost studies. As the former mayor, you could talk the

town hall, use your influence and reinstate those anti-ghost regulations –"

"No," Vlad stated resolute.

Danny stiffed in front of Tucker and he caught Sam's glance. She had raised an eyebrow, Tucker shrugged just as confused.

"And why not?" Maddie asked with annoyance coloring her voice, breaking the long silence Vlad hadn't cared to fill out with an explanation after his abrupt statement.

"Because I'm done hunting others, Madeleine," Vlad said and made a hard clanking sound as he put his teacup down, making most of the kitchen and teens jump, "and I will not allow you to hunt Danny Phantom or any of his companions in this town or any other town for that matter. Phantom may be a ghost, but he's also a hero and I have faith that he will stay truth to his good nature. As long as I am in Amity Park, you will not lay a finger on him. I won't allow it."

Sam lost her jaw and even Danny looked a little baffled. Tucker felt like Vlad had just blown his mind, "is he serious?"

"Kids?"

The teens cowered with sheepish grins as Jack opened the kitchen door, revealing them all for the rest of the kitchen.

"Hey, you're all just in time for dinner! Maddie and Arianna made spaghetti and I shaped the meat balls, look!" the man stated with a proud grin and showed them a bowl of Jack Fenton shaped meatballs, "look, it's me, I call them Fenton-balls!"

"Turn the sentence over in your head, before speaking, Jack dear," Maddie chimed and stood up to lead the teens to their seats, while Arianna and Jazz brought the food to the table, and Vlad rushed to keep his wife from carry anything.

Tucker took the seat in front of Danny and leaned over with a whisper, "you're okay, dude?"

"Sure," Danny retorted and looked over at his parents before sighing.

Tucker could only share a sad look with Sam, as Danny started poking at his dish, while his parents started talking about their ghost hunting again.

It wasn't the first time Tucker had given ear to the Fenton couples scary talks about killing or mutilate ghosts – especially when it came to Danny Phantom.

When Danny's ghost alias was brought up, his parents always seemed to go that extra mile, in describing how they would just love to strap him to a lab table and have their ways with him.

Dissection to find out what made him tick and torture in order to find out more about the Ghost Zone, revenge from all the times he humiliate them or got away with destruction of the town… just dividing him molecule, by molecule.

Tucker had heard all that and could only imagine what more Danny had been forced to endure during meals and residence in the Fenton household.

It still beat the techno-geek how Danny could keep a straight face, when his parents mentioned the Fenton-bone saw and even continue eating his dinner. Even smile at times and laugh at his father's gory jokes about capturing the ghost-kid.

His friend had nerves and stomach of steel, that was for sure.

Valerie poked Tucker's shoulder with a worried look, "have they always been like that? How can he stand it?"

"He's used to it…it's been like this for four years."

"Wow…"

"Yeah…"

Valerie blinked perplex as her chair was moved by Vlad and he forced himself in-between her and Dani. Dani scowled and rose to take the chair in front of her girlfriend instead. If her eyes could kill, Vlad would have been toast by now.

None of them said anything as the last got seated and the cramped table space got filled. Tucker had to keep his elbows close to him, in order to eat and a couple of glasses got lost during the meal.

Valerie almost choke on her spaghetti, when Dani got bored and started nudging the huntress' leg under the table. Tucker had to hide a snort and even Danny seemed to have a slight grin to offer.

Vlad was the first to address Danny during dinner talk and Tucker watched in continuing confusion, as his best friend lighted up and started joking with the billionaire.

It was so unlike Danny, that Tucker almost wanted to shake him, asking where his fruitloop hating friend had gone and how to get him back.

He didn't seem to be the only one watching the two halfa closely either. Sam and Valerie shared a look with him at least three times and tried to communicate by gestures and grimaces.

The teens finished their plates first and Sam made eyes, telling him to get some place to talk in private. B

oth of them rose, but was pressed back down by Jazz, "oh no, you don't. You guys still owe me a therapy session, running will only make you continue to bottle things up and I'm not standing for it!"

She took the spot at the end of the dinner table and lifted a couple of crayon drawing for them all to see.

Danny groaned and buried his face in his hands, "not the emotion crayons, Jazz. Just ship me off to the asylum instead. I'm ready."

"Very funny, little brother, you get your own paper in just a minute – in the meantime, while you little emotional unstable cowards ran, the rest of us expressed our feeling on paper," she said with a professional countenance and showed them the first piece of paper, "and I like us all to discuss them together and get to the bottom of the distress that seems to torment you all! So, Maddie, Arianna – what am I looking at here, what have you two tried to express with this colorful drawing?"

“It’s a little baby, Princess,” Maddie smiled and pointed, “see? It’s got a rattle and everything.”

“Very nice,” Jazz nodded pleased and adjusted her glasses, “and you made it with Arianna, so what can you tell?”

Arianna just shrugged, “its eating a cucumber stick? It’s a heathy baby.”

Jazz moved the drawing closer to her eyes with a sudden raised eyebrow, “and why, if I may ask, is the cucumber stick equipped with limbs and screaming for mercy?”

“What? You told me to be artistic and original.”

Jazz inhaled slowly and folded her hands, clearly not sharing Ariannas sense of humor.

“I’ll see you at our private session later,” she sighed and turned to Vlad and Jack with the next drawing, “alright, Jack, Vlad – what do you guys have for me? It’s very blue, what have you tried to express with that color? What am I looking at here?”

“It’s a ghost,” Jack said gleeful and Vlad smiled content.

“Yes, and the color blue is an artistic choice that shows sincerity, quietness, complete peace –”

“We kind of stole all the other crayons,” Arianna interrupted and Vlad sighed, “that too.”

They all grinned sheepishly and Jazz facepalmed, “can someone please take this serious?”

She removed her hand and found that the teens had deserted the table at some point, “I’m gonna get them for this…” -

Tucker looked around in the lab and ran his hand over some of the loose pieces on the counter, “you’re sure whatever ghost they have been torturing isn’t still down here now?”

“If it was here, it would have jumped us by now,” Sam retorted over

from the dissecting table and pokes one of the restraints with a disgusted face, “anyway, I just need to talk to you in private – this is getting so weird.”

“I know,” he said and looked around, “one moment Danny is telling on Vlad and then he’s making jokes about pancakes and talking in codes with him. It’s like we’ve walked into some alternative dimension or something! Was he really only at that place for four weeks?”

Sam coughed as dust fell over her and she placed the box she had been lifting down on the floor, “what is ‘Oladi’ even? I don’t get it.”

Tucker pulled out his PDA and made a quick googling, “says here it’s some kind of Russian pastry…Vlad swears in snacks, so maybe he was offending Danny?”

Sam groaned and searching in the lab’s closets along with him, “this is so wrong – and that thing about him supporting Phantom as the town’s hero? I bet Vlad knew we were listening the whole time. Just luring Danny and Dani with his little word plays and getting them all falling into falls security. I don’t buy the act one second, Vlad isn’t some modified soul ready to make amends – it’s Plasmius we’re talking about for fuck sake!”

“What’s the plan?”

Both of them jumped and turned around to find Valerie behind them, “you guys got a plan, right?”

Tucker looked around, “where did you park Dani and Danny?”

“They’re hiding at Jazz’ old room, Danny thought it would be the last pace for her to look,” she said lightly and gave the lab a look-over, “you two are planning to do that cleaving thing to Vlad, right?”

“Splitting,” Sam corrected and crossed her arms, “you were listening in outside the arcade?”

Valerie just smirked, “not a hunter for nothing, Manson. And also, I want in – I’m not gonna stand for that guy any longer, was did you say about that splitting? That you get a completely harmless human

Vlad in the process?"

Sam and Tucker shared a quick look.

Both of them had accepted the huntress into their midst, because of Danny and his big mouth, but that was where the border ended for them both.

Tucker knew Sam had a long history of jealousy and kitten fight with Valerie, but end up respecting the Red huntress in the long run.

Valerie was no longer a threat to Danny's life or love and had become part of the Phantom team, making her somewhat trustworthy. She was as much part of the inner circle as anyone could be, besides him and Sam of course.

Tucker had no problem with Valerie personally, but even he had to admit, he had been wrong about her before. In the end, it didn't really matter what he thought anyway. If Sam didn't wanted Valerie in, the huntress was out of the game.

He knew better than to go against the goth's opinion in matters like this. Girls were scary creatures for sure and goth was a just another word for violent women.

Sam finally nodded and Tucker made gesture for Valerie to help them search, "it's a funny story actually. Danny's parents made this huge dream catcher once, when they had this native American spiritual thing going and apparently it sorts out any possessing ghost that's in your body."

"Go on," she said and groaned when Sam placed three boxes in her arms, to get deeper into one of the closets.

"Well, Danny was having problems with making time both for Fenton and Phantom, and got the idea of splitting himself. You know, to be two placed at once and make life a little easy for himself. Get his social life back."

The huntress snorted, "sounds stupid and dangerous – and Danny had a social life before?"

“It was stupid and dangerous,” Sam retorted from inside the closet, before peeking out and moving to the next one, “imagine a cliché super hero Phantom and a super lazy teenage Danny. Like two different guys and none of them the Danny we knew before the accident.”

“So if you split Vlad,” Valerie started and Sam finished for her.

“You get a psycho Plasmius and a goody uncle-like Vlad. The kind who bakes cookies and knits sweaters for his cat.”

“He was cool,” Tucker grinned and watched the two girls work, “and when we split him and Danny sees Plasmius haven’t changed one bit, Danny’s gonna return to his senses. Dani to.”

Valerie grinned by that image, “we could keep the human Vlad around and send Plasmius back to the Ghost Zone.”

“Or better yet,” Sam smirked and dragged out the Fenton-Ghost-Catcher from the last closet, “we suck him into a thermos and ship it off to Clockworks place, where he can rot right next to Dark Phantom.”

Valerie tilted her head, “who?”

Tucker padded her back while Sam made her plans, “don’t worry I’ll fill you in – I have a presentation right here on the PDA actually.”

Valerie got the short history of what Tucker like to call “the Phantom journal” and took his sweet time with the whole timestamping part. Valerie got a little pale when he mentioned her part in the fight with Dark Phantom and Tucker couldn’t really blame her.

That was a lot to take in.

The geek had a suspicion that Danny wasn’t gonna like that his little secrets became public, but he was the one who had started it by dragging Valerie into the mess that was his life, so he could heartily blame Tucker for telling the red huntress the rest.

In the end, Danny would probably thank them anyway. When his best friend would come to realize Plasmius had just tricked him the

whole time, Tucker was sure Danny would be more than helpful in getting the thermos to its final resting place in the Ghost Zone.

Everyone would win anyway. Vlad would lose his evil side and become a better father and husband to his family, Danny would no longer have to fight Plasmius now or in the future and maybe even Vlad would come to see he was better off without Plasmius in his life.

Even if they were wrong – Tucker didn't count on that – and Plasmius would turn out to be less evil than the first time they split the billionaire, the job to get the two halves to fuse again would be easy and maybe they could all laugh at it afterwards.

"Alright we need a decoy," Sam said and moved back to watch her work. Tucker and Valerie came up beside her.

The Fenton-Ghost-Catcher had been placed beside the opening to the basements staircase and if someone came down, they would not see the trap before it hit them.

Sam had slightly tilted the invention with a chair as a safety and tied a rope from the chair to one of the pipes along the wall at the other side of the door to the lab. If someone ran down the stairs and triggered the rope, the chair would fall and the Fenton-Ghost-Catcher with it. Right down on the lab's visitor.

"Someone or something Vlad would come for right away and not send someone else down here for," Sam continued and looked deep in thought, "he has to come down here alone, Maddie and Jack can't know."

"We could pretend we're his cat?" Tucker offered and got a look from the goth, "just tell him it's down here then? I'm pretty sure he'd come for that."

"Vlad's not an idiot," Valerie snorted, "if he smells it's a trap he's gonna ruin all our chances – he has to rush down here or something. Just blind panic."

Tucker shrugged, "maybe he would come for Danny?"

Sam shook her head, "we can't trust that and I don't think Arianna is

gonna like what we've planning here either. Those two wouldn't cooperate with this, they into deep in Fruitloop land."

Valerie suddenly snapped her fingers, "Dani."

He and Sam gave her a look, "Dani likes him, why would she help?"

"Not help, just lure him in. Look," Valerie pulled out her phone and Tucker watched over her shoulder.

Dani was laughing and screaming in what seemed to be a tickling fight, but if someone heard the audio without the videos context, it sounded like the little halfa was being tortured to death. Tucker guessed that could work.

You didn't have to be an idiot to see that Vlad held some form of protecting feeling for Dani. Nether him or Sam trusted that Vlad really could feel compassion or love for anything but himself, but if that cheesehead held anything dear, Dani was probably one of them.

Sam rose an eyebrow, "and why do you have that video again?"

"I told Dani she grunts when she laughs, she said I was a liar, so I proved it to her," Valerie grinned, "plus its funny, she looks so cute when she's being tickled."

Sam didn't comment on that and folded her hands instead, "aright, here's the plan – Valerie."

The teen made a sassy salute.

"You distract the Fentons and keep Danny away from the lab – Tucker, you hid down here and make that video going. I'll go upstairs, tell Vlad that Dani got stuck in some machine and led him down here. Tucker, you make a thermos ready to catch Plasmius and I keep one on me in case you miss. We will be on both sides of him, it can't go wrong."

Valeri nodded, "sounds bullet proof, let's do it."

They put their hands together and got to work. Both Sam and Valerie jumped over the rope and ran upstairs, while Tucker found a cozy

hideout in one of the counters in front of the open basement door.

He pulled out his own phone and waited for Sam's signal in the dark.

He didn't have to wait for long as a text message made his phone vibrate.

- Val got the other distracted – start the video

"That's my cue," he hummed and started the video.

Dani's screams of joy made echo in the lab and Tucker had to take his eyes away from the video, in order to keep a laughter at bay. He listened carefully and caught the first signs of commotion upstairs.

Someone was coming down and Tucker prepared his thermos.

The sound of Sam's protest was vague over the noise from the video and Tucker frowned. He snapped out of it when the chair outside his hideout was toppled and the trap fell down on its victim. Tucker jumped out of his hideout and pointed his thermos, "got you!"

The rest of his prepared battle cry died down on his lips, when Sam came sprinting down the stair three steps at a time and shared his horrified stare.

Vlad was the last to come running down and pushed his way past Sam.

The Fenton-Ghost-Catcher had caught a halfa alright, just not the halfa they'd hoped for.

The complete Nightshade gasped next to the human Arianna, who had lost her jaw in shock. Nightshade's blank face suddenly cracked into the grin of a maniac and she rose to the air, "freedom!"

"Uh-oh," Sam murmured as Nightshade phased out of her black sweater dress in favor of her black lingerie, boots and jacket, put her long pink hair in a high ponytail and shot for the celling.

Arianna stared after her ghost half and blinked as the last of her disappeared out of the lab. The confused woman stood, adjusted her

expensive dress and made sure her hair was in it neat bun, before addressing them slightly shaken, “what…just happened?”

“Yes,” Vlad hissed and turned to the two teens with murder in his red eyes, “What. Just. *Happened?*”

Sam and Tucker got the same idea at once.

Run.

Chapter 32

Danny could only watch with his hands folded in front of his mouth, as the world seemed to go bats hit crazy in front of him.

He wasn't praying – yet – but it was close.

The last thing he remembered before his weekend turned into a chaotic nightmare, was him and Dani walking downstairs from there short hiding in Jazz's room.

He had been surprised to see his parents running to the door equipped with weapons for ghost hunting, "you guys going hunting? Now?"

Valerie ran past him and opened the door for them, "am I'm the only one that listened to the radio anymore? Some ghost has gone crazy down town. Why would I lie?"

"But we haven't reach the finished therapy session!" Jazz protested and tried keeping their father from leaving the house, by holding on to his Fenton-Bazooka and put her heals in the floor, "we're getting to the core of the problem, we're so close!"

"Then," Valerie said and gave the red-haired woman a push, "why don't you go with them?"

Jazz looked like the girl had just asked her to lick the toilet and let go of her father instantly, "over my dead body."

Valerie frowned before closing the door behind the Fenton couple, gave the kitchen a glance and started pushing Jazz in the direction of Danny, "when what about we do that therapy session you talked about earlier? Just you, me, Danny and Dani – in his room – right now."

"Hey," Danny protested as he was pushed to his room. Something was way of here. Valerie normally saw his parents as rivals when it came to ghost fighting. Why would she give a hunt up for emotional talking with him and his sister?

That made no sense.

Danny's suspicion of hidden motives got confirmed when he got a glimpse of Sam peeked out of the kitchen and gave Valerie a thumb up.

Danny used his ghost strength and stopped the train that was Valerie pushing them around, "alright, what's going on here?"

"Only you *not* going," Valerie gasped as she put all her muscles into winning the battle, "let's just talk about our bottled up feeling and silly traumas, till we start crying in unison or something, come on, move it!"

Both Dani and Danny just crossed their arms and turned intangible. Valerie and Jazz cried out, as they fell through them and landed on the carpet. Danny stated going back to the kitchen and felt

Valerie grab his ankle, "no! Not that way!"

"Seriously, Val. What's going on?"

The huntress reply was drowned out by a loud ruckus coming from the lab and the distant sound of someone screaming.

Valerie called after him, but Danny shot to the other end of the house, faster than he had in a long time and almost collided with Sam and Tucker, who came running up from the basement like death was hot on their tails.

That could might have been the case.

Plasmius appeared next with a savage scowl and flaring hands.

Both jumped to cower behind Danny and he put his hands up to calm Vlad down, "what the hell is happening?"

"What is *happening!?*" Plasmius asked bewildered and mad to the core, "those little rats set me up for a trap and now Arianna is –"

Whatever Arianna was, it was suddenly all forgotten by the raging half-ghost as his wife appeared in the door to the lab and moved past

him with an unreadable face.

Vlad turned human and took her hand in a desperate attempt to get her fully attention, “don’t worry we get your ghost-half back, I promise I’ll fix this. The baby is going to be alright. Please say something.”

Danny crocked his head. Arianna look alright to him, maybe a little pinker and neater than normal, but fine nevertheless. Maybe even a little older and more mature than usual, but not hurt. What was Vlad babbling about again?

The woman suddenly turned to Vlad, widened her eyes and grabbed his bolo tie.

“Vlad…your outfit…its RUINED!”

Her audience blinked confused and Vlad just stood there, “sweetheart, that’s heartily a matter –”

“Your tie is loose; your shit is wrinkled and look at those windows! They are dirty!”

She rushed past them like a pink hurricane and returned fully equipped with vacuum cleaner, mop and cleaning supplies, “how can you just stand there, when this house is falling apart? Its unactable! It’s not even my house!”

Sam put her hands up to protect her face as Arianna threw the mob at her and Tucker was knocked to the floor when the drycleaner came right at him. Danny got an apron and window cleaner.

“This house is out of control and unworthy for human living – look at that lawn, what will the neighbors think about us? That we’re savage people, eating fruit unwashed?”

Dani stopped munching on the apple she had brought to the show and hid it behind her back.

The woman grabbed Valeri, Jazz and Dani at once and pushed them to the kitchen, “the Fentons is returning in less than four hours and I want three types of profiteroles with four fillings made from scratch

before that, so start working people! I want those counters looking like an Ikea magazine, those plants need to be looking fake in an hour max – no one sits anywhere till I tell you! There cannot be any sign of living or use of this house! It needs to be perfect! And if it not, you better believe I burn it down to the ground and rebuilt it till it is!"

"Arianna, please," Vlad begged and tried taking the chair she was moving from her, "we need to find your ghost-half and get you two fused again before it affects the baby."

The billionaire was shut up as he wife grabbed his tie and started dragging him to the living room, "it's six thirty and time for your Packer show – so sit down and watch, while I go out and brew an organic beer from scratch."

Danny waited until she had left for the kitchen, before ripping of the apron of and turned to Sam and Tucker, "you split her!?"

"We were going for Plasmius, but she got in the way," Tucker defended, "how was we supposed to know Valerie hadn't got her out of hearing reach?"

"Hey!" Valerie yelled from the busy kitchen and the three females peeked out.

Jazz looked worried, "Danny, we have get them fused back again, Vlad's right, what have happened to the baby? Are they both pregnant now or are the fetus split up?"

"Okay, okay!" Danny said and felt like freaking out, "okay I go get Nightshade, while you guys keep human Arianna busy."

"Why us?" Dani scowled, "I say you guys stay and me and the kitchen slaves here go for the ghost hunt. We're females, we have a better chance of finding her than you."

"No, you just don't wanna bake or wear that pink apron," Danny noted and turned ghost, "I'm the one with the best chances of finding her and bringing her back – you stay."

"You all stay," Vlad raged and returned from the living room, fligning

a blanket of him and set the newspaper and smoking pipe aside, “Dani, keep your mother occupied till I return and make sure she doesn’t hurt herself in her madness.”

Dani pouted, but did as he said, “fine! But you all gonna be eating my pastry no matter how burned it gets!”

Vlad hasted to transform and phased through the door, Danny followed him, “I’m going with you.”

The man only nodded and shot for the air. -

Sam and Tucker checked if the cost was clear and she made a sign for him to move with her, “she’s in the kitchen, let’s go.”

Both sneaked down the hallway and ran the last stretch to the lab, before the crazy housewife could stop them. Tucker grabbed what they needed (net, ghost-paralyzing weapons – small explosives…)

“Hey you think Nightshade is gonna come willingly or fight us to the death?”

Sam started the engines to the Specter-speeder (2!) and helped him in, “if she the diametric opposite of that crazy clone of my mother upstairs...then we’re gonna need some bigger guns.”

They both jumped as a certain someone called their names from the stairs. Arianna soon appeared at the bottom of the stairs in her new attire, wearing white gloves, a capelet and pearls.

“Those rose beds isn’t going to fix themselves and neither is your summer homework. Come back this instant!”

“Fly, Sam!” Tucker squeaked and slammed the door to the speeder.

Sam pressed the accelerator pedal down and hold tight as they shot down the house speeder launcher.

Arianna looked down the launch ramp with a delicate raised fist, “no dessert for any of you for four years! You’re grounded!”

The teens sighed in relief now safe in the speeder and flying though

the free air. Sam turned on the local radio and both teens shared a worried look, as the reported warned people to stay away from the amusement park.

Sam shook her head, “it’s like déjà vu. That was the exact same place Danny and his split half fought against Technus, those years back.”

“Maybe we get to try the roller-coaster again?” Tucker grinned, but got the hint when Sam scowled. She had not found the violent ride funny one bit, “let’s just hope they won’t be as difficult to get our ghost to return to its human, as in Danny’s case.”

Tucker gave her one of the battle suits and jumped into his own. Sam made the speeder’s autopilot take over and jumped into her own suit, as the inflatable Jack Fenton steered them safely to the harbor.

Sam wasn’t sorry that they had tried to split Vlad, but bit her lip still. If something had happened to the fetus inside Arianna, she wasn’t sure she could forgive herself. The goth begged that the baby had just split along with its mother and would be fine when they fused back together.

If the baby was a halfa, it would have its own ghost and human half to split, right?

But if the baby was pure human…when who was carrying the fetus and in worse case…. what part of the fetus was who carrying?

Sam shivered by that macabre image and told herself to relax. Arianna had looked fine and so had Nightshade before she ditched them for supposedly “freedom”.

And apparently freedom meant the amusement park by the harbor. Sam held the speeder back with a hard pull at the wheel, when a strange parade shot past them down the street. Sam rose to a higher level to get the entire scene.

Nightshade flew down the town with her armful of stolen goods. She laughed as she turned up for her stolen boomebox and formed the vanguard of a large number of pursuers right behind her.

The Fenton couple speeded after her in their RV with open fire and

Jack Fenton half out of the window with a bazooka, while the Guys in White followed right behind in their white cars and motorcycles.

The police and their sirens formed rearguard and shouted incomprehensible order over their megaphones. As a final addition came the Boxghost. He didn't seem to be interested in halfa or her number of spontaneous crimes, but her boomebox.

"I'M THE ONLY GHOST WHO MAY OBERATE SQUARE OBJECTS! HAND IT OVER! I AM THE BOX GHOST!"

Tucker and Sam facepalmed and felt the speeder almost tilt in the air as a red and white object shot past them.

"Looks like Vlad and Danny found her," Tucker said and jumped down next to Sam as she speeded up and followed the parade.

Vlad shot after the Fenton RV, while Danny tried getting up beside Nightshade and almost got shot, when his father discovered all his most wanted ghost had assembled at the same place, "today will be the day you all move in to Ya cages, spokes!"

Vlad replied by blasting the RV's roof blaster and Maddie fought to get the vehicle back on track. The white clad authorities got their head start now that the Fentons was occupied and moved as a formation to catch the pink-haired ghost.

Sam gasped when three of the agents stood on their cars roof and fired an electric net. Nightshade crackled like crazy and teleported in the last second.

The agents cried out when the net came slamming down again and caught two of the motorcycles and got them tangled with their cars. The police braked to avoid a collision and five fire hydrants got knocked down along with four parked cars.

Only the Fenton RV kept up the chase, as Maddie activated the cars jumping button and made the three police cars her launching ramp.

"You're not getting away this time!" Maddie yelled out the window and shot a ball of paralyzing electricity after her target.

Danny threw himself in before the unnoticing halfa and fell like a wounded bird from the sky. Sam steered the speeder after him and Danny went intangible in the air and landed down between her and Tucker.

The teen coughed a ring of smoke and laid paralyzed on the floor. Tucker grabbed the anti-paralyzer from his gadget belt and Danny sighed as he got the feeling back in his limbs.

“Nailed it, dude,” Tucker smirked and helped his friend getting his smoking hair and hazmat suit under control. Danny wincing at his aching chest, “human Arianna?”

“Back home, forcing Dani to study and the others to make shuffle,” Sam replied and put the speeder back into the chase, “you got anything?”

“This Nightshade doesn’t seem to be the type for chat and cookies,” Danny groaned, “she’s not even responding to Vlad, minus the bloodlust and thirst for mindless destruction, she like the split Plasmius!”

“Wow,” Tucker cringed, “seems like being a good halfa, doesn’t mean a good ghost. Maybe we were wrong.”

“Oh, you just realized that now?” Danny scowled, apparently still pissed about their little attempt to split Vlad earlier, “I hope you’re proud of yourself, ‘cause when we get Nightshade and Arianna back to normal, you two are gonna apologize to her and Vlad.”

Sam frowned, but saw his point, “fine – how do we do this?”

They all watched from the cockpit, as Vlad continued his fight with the Fentons and blasted the agents who dared to keep up the chase. Sam frowned, “why isn’t he duplicating? He can’t keep up like that.”

“He already is,” Danny said and looked through the speeders interior to find something useful, “his duplicates are the army who’s keeping the Cube from enter the human world and come for us at this moment. He’s been doing this for months, I’m surprised he can even keep up with my parents at this rate!”

Sam felt her cheeks color in embarrassment. Wow, wasn't that embarrassing. Tucker shared a look with her and both turned to Danny, ashamed.

"Just help me, okay?" Danny sighed and they jumped to do their best. Danny took the wheel and tried finding a target to shoot. He got a short moment of déjà vu and whistled quietly.

He had been in the exact same position when his dad had asked his human part to shoot his split Phantom. Making his old man proud.

His eyes darted to the RV under him and he felt his guts curl. If they didn't got things back under control and that fast, they risked revealing Arianna's secret to his parents.

Danny hoped it wouldn't get to that, but asked himself what he would do if things ran down the drain and his luck ran out with it.

He remembered his mother's words of torturing that ectopus, like it was noting and his father comment about a cage for each of the halfas. He loved his parents…he really did.

But if he had to choose…

He shot the RV and saw his mother press the Fenton-rejecter, just as he had hoped. Both ghost hunters got flung out of the RV and watched from their parachutes as the RV was blasted to pieces.

Nightshade rose a fist in the air to the sight of the explosions and landed on the flooded street. Danny phased out of the Speeder and went up to Plasmius.

Nightshade let all of her stolen goods fall to the ground without a care and smirked as Maddie Fenton landed two meters from her, weapon charged.

"Ready to turn yourself over, spoke?" Maddie sneered.

Nightshade giggled devilishly, "ready to lose your legs?"

"Don't you dare!" Vlad interfered and placed himself in front of Nightshade, "you stay away from my family, human!"

Both Jack and Maddie grinned scornfully as Danny joined the other halfas. Shaken their heads in amused amazement.

“Ah, would you look at that, Mads. Ghosts actually form nests. That’s hilarious.”

Maddie smirked, “imitating family based bonds and relations. Pathetic.”

Vlad’s red eyes assembled to narrow cracks and Danny grabbed his claw to keep him from doing something stupid, “Vlad, just ignore them and let’s get out of here. We have Nightshade, let’s just go.”

“Interesting,” Maddie muttered and nudged her husband, “Phantom has voluntarily taken a role as their offspring and shows caregiving for their leading male. Perhaps ghosts respond to systems of alpha males and submit to roles based on the age they died in? Who knows which of the three here is the oldest ghost?”

She suddenly lighted up, “a bone marrow sample would defiantly tell. Call Jazz and tell her to get the ribcage saw ready.”

Vlad growled and moved to fight. Danny grabbed both of them and dragged them down the portal he created under their feet. Both Maddie and Jack gasped before the three halfas disappeared out of sight and the portal closed after them.

Sam pressed her hands against the cockpits glass. She felt her phone buzz and pulled it out.

- Bring human A. to the old Factory by the harbor.

- Love U.

She sighed and took the wheel, “hold on tight, Tuck, we have a human to pick up.”

“You got it, dude,” he retorted and pressed the maximum engine.

-

“And you want me to do what, exactly?”

Clockwork didn't care to turn around from the screens and forced himself to keep appearance. The Observants behind him had reached their limit and as he had expected, come to him with their complaints.

"Kill them," the leading Observant replied gravely and the other nodded in the reflection on Clockworks screens. *Like mindless puppets…*

"This have gone too far," another Observant continued and they all scowled, "the halfas have assembled just as we feared and as the path is going in this very second, they will certainly reach the destructive future we predicted years ago."

Clockwork snorted untouched by their whining, "then why didn't you stop them, if you have known this path for such a long time span?"

The leader tensed in anger, "because we trusted your supervision. You are the master of time, Clockwork. The all-knowing ghost and keeper of time – you failed us! You didn't foresee!"

"Oh, I foresaw it," he retorted softly and soothed the image in front of him. Three halfas hiding in the dark and arguing over trifles. His beloved subjects. "I saw this future and the many futures before it. I have followed every step of the halfas movements and are still hoping they take the right paths and little turns of time. It is time in its pure form, everything is as it should be. I had no impact on it. And I had the assumption that the Observants wanted time to unfold on its own?"

They didn't seem to appreciate his wits or subtle criticism and hummed like a pack of angry bees. Clockwork lifted his head slightly, hoping to get a glimpse of his lover hiding up under the roof.

The old ghost knew it was times like this that proved Dan's love to its fullest. The specter didn't hide that he wanted nothing more than to destroy the Observants and everything they stood for.

Staying hidden with suppressed core and watching Clockwork's humiliation and beatings wasn't something he did willingly. Clockwork had promised him that this wouldn't be for long. He had

planes after all.

“They must be destroyed,” The Observant pressed on without mercy, “going back in time won’t solve this problem. We must interfere as it is and change what we can’t without disturbing time. We must!”

“We must,” the other chimed darkly and Clockwork frowned.

“Then let me suggest this.”

The observant lifted their eyeballs as Clockwork made one of the bigger screens come to life and scenes of the future played one by one.

Guards of the Cube capturing the four halfas.

Nightshade fighting for her and the unborn child in her abdomens life, in an arena of ghost hunters.

Dani being dragged to unknown places by slave traders.

Danny and Vlad fighting to the death in the arena.

The observant began to nod and murmur vaguely in the quit tower. The leader folded his bony hands in reconciliation, “we accept, do your work, Time Keeper. We wish to Observe.”

The ancient ghost nodded and jumped into the screen. The Observants watched as the ghost froze time in the Ghost Zone and captured Vlad Plasmius’ duplicates one by one in a thermos.

Kept their energy from returning to their halfa and open the gates for the Cube to get in to the human world.

Clockwork materialized in a dark abandoned factory back in the human world and froze the three halfas. He moved quietly to the vampire-ghost and removed his wrist watch.

The little technological wonder and millions of hours of work, crushed into scraps in the timekeeper’s hand and was burned to nothing.

The Observants did as they did best, observed. None of them noticed as an invisible, suppressed core left the tower and moved out and into the Ghost Zone's sphere.

Dan shot through the green world he knew all too well, but still didn't recognize as his own, as he moved to one of the zone's few manmade portals. He kept his invisibility up as he pushed past the big football and entered the lab.

The security reacted to his presents, but then read his core, voice and eye and let him pass. Dan grinned. So much for person based security, Plasmius.

"Time out," he commanded with his hand on his medallion and watched the world around him froze.

The castle's inhabitants froze all as one and Dark moved past them as he made his way through the castles long corridors and hidden rooms.

The borrowed power was a nice addiction to his personal power arsenal and he twilled the medallion around his muscular neck with a hum.

He passed a couple of duplicated maids, all frozen in there cleaning routine, while the original ghost was seeing seated at one of the tables, apparently in the midst of a discussion with a big mean-looking ghost, a timid butler and Ghost Writer, who had stopped with a teacup to his lips.

Dan pulled a letter out of his purple timekeeper cloak and placed it on the table before continuing his mission.

Back at the corridor, a cap wearing ghost was seen in mid step, trying to help a tall lanky ghost beside him, carrying what looked to be a big Venus flytrap of ghostly origins.

Dan phased trough them and continued until he got to the room he was heading for.

Vlad Masters' treasure room was no means like that of a dragon or a greedy king, but Dan knew all too well, that it was the same

insatiable desire to valuable possessions that drove this room.

He passed the cabinets of rare and dangerous books of forbidden knowledge and glass displays of maps and scrolls of other worlds and prophecies. He already knew them all by heart and had only eyes for the display of jewelry.

Some of those shining stones that adored the gold and silver chains and crowns, was either cursed, held ancient powers or had once belonged to powerful creatures and rulers. Some of them all of that combined.

Dan phased his hand through the glass and pulled out three objects. Not the most shining, biggest, or valuable looking, but compared to the rest of the room, they were artifact that would decide the near future of the world.

The grave specter placed the Ring of Rage and the Crown of Fire in bag he had brought for the purpose. Carrying both artifacts on his person would be too much of a temptation and he needed to stay focused.

He left the castle and its now moving and unknowing ghost to themselves and returned to the tower, that was now empty except from the ghost Dan Phantom had made his mate and possession.

Clockwork smirked as he felt his lover return to him. Now with two medallions around his neck.

Chapter 33

“I said no and that’s it.”

Danny facepalmed and Vlad ripped some of his black hair out, “you have to! You belong with your human half and that’s the last word in this discussion!”

Nightshade just uncrossed her legs and turned over to lay on her back, “no. She’s boring and I’m tired of being left out of all the fun. Just put her in the kitchen where she belongs. Paint it pink, that’ll make her stay.”

Danny checked his phone for the fifth time to see how long it be before Sam and Tucker came along and scowled, “Night, take it from two halfas who have tried getting split – you’re gonna miss your other half. You’re not complete or sane like this. You not even you!”

“I doubt it,” she drawled and looked down on him from the boxes she had taken seat on.

A rat ran over her lap and she snatched it without a care.

She held it up by the tail and started burning it slowly with a flaring hand, “all that freedom and she just wasted it on nothing. We could have taken over the world, the Ghost Zone or travelled dimensions, but *nooo*, she decided to settle down and be the petty little housewife you guys seems to want. If you like her so much, keep her. I’m out of here.”

She threw the screaming rat away and jumped down with same bravura as a feline.

Vlad slammed his hand into the box in front of her, keeping her from taking one more step. The man had been patient in his own demanding ways, but patient nevertheless.

Nightshade frowned and leaned up against the boxes with crossed arms and a clearly challenging attitude, “you gonna punish me, Vladimir? Go on, fight me.”

“Over my dead body,” Vlad sneered and she laughed, “oh, honey-sugar-bun, you’re already dead. We all are, it’s so pathetic. The most powerful creatures in the world and all you two do is fighting one another.”

Danny sighted as he received a text from his girlfriend, “maybe, but not anymore. And you got company, as they say.”

Nightshade hissed as the specter-speeder flew into the factory hall. Vlad took a secure grip on her shoulders when she tried running and locked her arms behind her back.

Vlad had been pleased to discover that only the human half remembered the aikido movements and Nightshade stayed in place with bared teeth.

Sam landed the speeder in the middle of the dusty concrete floor and turned the engines of. Jazz and Valerie jumped out and the little halfa dragged the human Arianna with her.

Tucker and Sam followed suit with the Fenton-Ghost-Catcher and placed it on the ground, ready to undo their own mess. Arianna moved to the three halfas and the two halves measured each other by the eyes.

“I’m not fusing with that thing,” Arianna decided and stuck her nose in the air with crossed arms. Sam groaned loudly and Valerie sighed.

Dani scowled, “but you have to, mom…uhm, moms? – I don’t wanna be a divorced kid! And I’m not going to boarding school either!”

Nightshade untangled herself from her husband’s grip and tossed with the long ponytail, “like I would ever fuse back with some weak human with a measuring tape up her ass.”

“Shameless whore.”

“Prude.”

“You’re a disgrace to all that’s decency.”

“And you’re no lady.”

Arianna gasped, “you take that back!”

“Girls, girls,” Jazz interfered and pushed the two women apart, “how about we sort this out with our feelings instead? Talk about why we won’t fuse and maybe why we should fuse again – okay?”

The two halves just crossed their arms dismissively and stared the other down. Jazz clapped her hand with a smile, “alright, I go first – Arianna, you told me the day you realized you had become a halfa, you felt like it was the greatest day of your life, remember?

Arianna said nothing, but something had changed in her eyes and she looked down.

“And Nightshade, remember all the times you talked to her in the night after those matches back at the arena? How you encouraged her to go on, even though you two almost died?”

Nightshade just looked away with a closed expression. None of them looking at each other or showing that they had come closer to a solution.

“Don’t you see?” Jazz continued, “you two need each other.”

“*No!*” they stated in unison and everyone groaned.

“Oh for the love of god,” Vlad sneered and grabbed the Fenton-Ghost-Catcher and tried catching the two halves, “stop acting so foolish and do as I say!”

“Make me!” they yelled and dodged his attempts.

Danny rubbed his neck tiredly, “I don’t remember being that difficult.”

Sam just gave him a look, “one word; bedsheet.”

Danny cringed, “I’m never outlive that, will I?”

“Nope,” she replied and watched Vlad run after the two women, like a man trying to catch butterflies with an oversized net, “this isn’t working and at this rate they're never fusing back together.”

“I call for the housewife Arianna then,” Tucker said and lifted his hand, the others scowled at him and he shrugged, “what? She’s the halve that cooks and cleans. The other’s just a mean chick in lingerie.”

Vlad forced the black coat around Nightshade and sent the geek a murderous look, “stop talking and help me here!”

Dani jumped to help her three parents and the rest of the teens tried catching the teleporting Nightshade, while Vlad focused on getting the human halve to get under the Fenton-Ghost-Catcher.

All activity stopped as the hangar doors of the factory burst open. Danny facepalmed as Maddie and Jack Fenton jumped in with charged weapons.

“Not now,” he groaned and could only watch as his parent made their own conclusions of the inside of the hall.

Jack gasped and pulled out his Jack o' Nine Tails, “they got the kids and Arianna!”

The four halfas shared a look. Without context, it could look like Vlad was hurting the human Arianna with the grip in her arm and Danny looked no better with his hands on her shoulder.

Maddie moved fast as lightning to stand in front of Jazz, Tucker and Sam, “let Arianna go and nobody get hurt too much, ghosts!”

Jack lifted an eyebrow by the sight of Valerie in her full gear and scoffed, “looks like we meet again, Red huntress. I think we can take it from here, young lady. Shoo!”

The girl just sighed and pointed her gun at the man’s temple, glad that she hadn’t taken her helmet of, “I was here first, these are my ghosts, so find something else to hunt and please let it be somewhere else. We’re kinda in the middle of something here.”

“No, wait a second here, missy,” Maddie said and stood tall with her scowling husband right behind her, “we have been hunting Phantom, The Wisconsin ghost and Three-eyed-shady for years!”

“Nightshade,” both halves corrected and Maddie turned her bazooka back to them.

“And there’s no way, we gonna let some teenager interfere. This is our fight!”

“You said it, babe!” Jack cheered and threw his nine tails.

Dani screamed as the electrocuting wired locked around her body. To everybody’s horror, both ghost hunters lost their jaws, as the little halfa transformed back to human and became an unconscious Dani Masters.

Vlad grabbed the fishing line with a furious growl and pulled. Maddie gasped as her husband was thrown into the air and landed in a pile of boxes. She wasted no time, but fired at Danny and the teen made a wide shield for him and the others.

Jazz acted like she stumbled in front of her mother and thwarted the woman’s next shot, “ups!”

Tucker and Sam jumped into the fight with their own guns and the halfas shifted to make shields and fire at the two ghost hunters.

Danny shot a light ghost-ray at his father, not wanting to hurt him and discovered that he had lost sight of Nightshade. He found her standing on one of the box piles. Watching them with dead eyes.

Danny caught her eyes and shook his head, but that didn’t change anything. She turned her back on them and phased out of the factory and their lives.

Vlad pressed the unconscious Dani, Arianna and Danny in behind him and threw up a thick shield, when Maddie tossed five paralyzing gradates at them. Danny shook Nightshades betrayal of his mind and returned to the fight that was the now.

He could worry about the future later.

Arianna tried getting Dani back to consciousness by shaking her and pressed Dani into her chest to protect her. Remembering that the specter-speeder had a first aid kit and tried running for it with Dani

still secure in her arms, but Jack caught her and tried taking Dani from her.

“Don’t worry, I have a cage for that ghost-hybrid back in the speeder.”

“Don’t take my child!” Arianna cried out and stunned Jack long enough to get out of his grip.

Vlad teleported along with Danny and placed themselves between Jack and the escaping woman, giving her a chance. Jack lifted his Ghost-gloves like a boxer with a scowl, “alright, spoke. Let’s finish this.”

Danny jumped out of the way and searched for his mother in the chaos. Arianna had jumped into the speeder and was trying to get it started along with Sam and Jazz.

Tucker had turned to desperate measures and simply jumped down to grab the annoyed Maddie Fenton’s leg and all but hang after her, as the woman moved to fire at Danny, “let go of me, Tucker!”

“But I need an adult. There’s ghost here.”

His mother fired at Danny’s face and missed when Tucker jumped up and pulled her arm. Danny shot up into the open and threw a shield down to protect Vlad’s back from his mother’s shots.

She had shaken Tucker of her and started firing at Danny like there was no tomorrow. Below him, Valerie was flying on her board around in what seemed like a pattern and shot light after light with her gun.

Danny moved out of her way and squeaked as his mother pulled out her double lightsaber.

“You won’t get away from me this time, Phantom!” she yelled and Danny made a summersault to get out of her reach.

Danny dodged as she tried frying his chest and stretched his body to avoid getting sizzled by the burning ecto ends. A blast toppled his mother and Danny turned to the speeder, where Jazz had pressed the

button to roof blaster, “ups!”

Maddie jumped back on her feet with a furious frown and pointed her bazooka without looking. The roof blaster exploded and Jazz cried out and everyone in the speeder took cover.

“Mom!”

“Sorry, sweetie, but mom can’t lose this,” his mother yelled back and went for Danny’s face. Danny flew out of the way and took a quick peek back to see how Vlad was doing.

Vlad hadn’t used a duplicate or teleported the entire fight and Danny had the dreadful suspicions that Vlad had reached his limit. The many moths of duplication seemed to have drained him of powers and the man looked like he was running on his last resources.

A hit to the head made Danny grunt in pain and sent him straight to the floor. He looked up at the grinning woman that was his mother and lost his breath as she pointed the sizzling end of her lightsaber right over his core, “say goodnight.”

Behind her, Valerie pointed her gun to the last light of the building and Danny smirked to Maddie’s confusion, “night!”

The light bulb exploded and the hall turned pitch black. The night vision owning halfas used that to their advantage and the ghost hunters turned around in confusing with their slightly glowing weapons.

Danny flew to the speeder and phased inside it. Sam, Tucker and Jazz was all working by the panels, while human Arianna tried waking Dani up from her daze and bandaging her burns.

“Why aren’t we flying?” Danny asked and smelled the smoke that came from the speeder’s roof.

“Your mother damage the engine, dude,” Tucker retorted panicked and tried assembling the tools he could find, “you have to get Vlad to teleport you guys or make a portal!”

“Vlad is drained and I can’t risk us getting trapped by the Cube,”

Danny said and grabbed his head, trying to find some way out of this mess.

Arianna turned to him with wide eyes, “the Cube? They’re still hunting me? But Vlad said he bribed them to let me alone!”

Danny looked away and the others couldn’t meet her eyes. Arianna pressed a hand to her mouth and all of them looked up as Valerie jumped into the speeder, now missing her helmet, “Danny you have to do something! I think they’re killing Vlad!”

Arianna rose and went for the door, Danny grabbed her, “you can’t go out there, you’re only human!”

“Only the half of one,” she replied sternly and got out of his hands, before running into the dark.

Danny followed her and squinted. Several flashing bombs had been dropped on the ground and made the hall flash in white and black images. Danny’s night vision got all confused and he switched to his human eyes, trying to get used to the constant blinking lights.

Short images of Vlad fighting his parents flashed before him and Danny moved to the place they had been a second before.

The confusing world of flashing images that reminded him of those stroboscope light you find at parties, turned him all confused and damaged is coordination. He cried out when a green lightsaber knocked him down.

Danny’s eyes darted panicked as the images of his mother moved quickly around and then out of his line of vision again.

He thought he saw Arianna wrestle with his dad and Vlad, but the next second the end of the lightsaber was stabbed into his eye.

Danny screamed in pain and curled up on the cold concrete floor, pressing his hands to his burned eye. He felt his healing powers kick in, but couldn’t keep a sob from shaken through his body.

“Now, lay still,” Maddie growled and lifted the staff to knock his temple. Danny tried getting his shield up, but the burning feeling

made him wanna faint and he lost the connection to his inner powers.

He couldn't even turn human.

"Mom, please…"

Danny couldn't stand the expression of loathing on her face, the sneer she only showed when she was facing him as Phantom. The pure hatred.

He had told himself for so long, that it didn't matter, that she just didn't knew, that she in the end loved him. He was the one insisting on keeping this a secret for her and was to blame for this.

If he had just come clean from the start and told her and his dad about his transformation, he would never have to see those expressions. How could familiar faces that told him words of love and care, change the next and promise him harm?

His fault. His secret. His fault.

He was so tired.

"Mom, it's me, Danny. I'm your son!" he pleaded, but to no use.

"Nice try ghost, but leis won't help you now."

Danny gritted his teeth as the staff came down. The sound of sizzling flesh reached him before the pain and the smell of burned flesh and bone, before the dark nothing.

Danny opened his eyes in confusing, when the darkness failed to appear and the pain kept him waiting.

Nightshade towered over him and held the staff in place with her hand. Maddie struggled to get it back, but the ghost just clenched her fist and let her hand burn to the bones. The smell of ectoplasm and smoke oozing from her hand.

"Thought you ditched us for freedom," Danny joked weakly.

She sighed and turned her hand to push the staff into Maddie's stomach and send her tumbling away with the lightsaber, "the place is swarmed with Cube guards. It safer in here than out there. Looks like freedom equals you losers."

She grabbed him without further words and teleported them four times before getting to the Fenton-Ghost-Catcher. Nightshade turned around and shoot a black chain into the flashing darkness.

The human Arianna was pulled in with a squeal and the ghost caught her human half. The two stared at each other with distrust, hateful spite and even disgust, before Nightshade extended a hand.

Arianna looked from her to the stiff hand and then nodded. They locked their arms around each other as they kicked the dreamcatcher and let it fall down on them and broke into three pieces.

Danny supported himself by a pile of boxes and smiled as the now collected Nightshade stood in front of him. He smirked and pressed a hand to his healing eyes, "I don't have a sneakers bar, but…better?"

"Better," she whispered with tired eyes.

She buried her face in the crock at his shoulder as he hugged her and patted her back.

The sound of a charging lightsaber alerted them that they had company and she pushed them both out of the harm's way, as the lightsaber planted itself in the box where their heads had been a moment earlier.

Danny crabbed out of his mother's reach on the concrete floor and Maddie followed him until Nightshade moved to stand over him and made a clear sign to his mother that Danny was of limit.

His mother just scoffed, "playing his mother again and pretend human behavior? How pathetic!"

"Pathetic?" the female halfa asked icily and shoot three blasts into the air.

The black energy blasts turned into three glowing globes and lighted

the hall up in dark light. Jack threw Vlad of him and jumped to stand by his wife. Vlad grabbed his wounded ribs and took a stand over Danny, as the teen sat up with a hand over his eye.

“You find *me* pathetic? Look at yourself, human,” Nightshade snared and took a step towards the two ghost hunters, “I’m not the one being played for a fool for four years! The two leading ghost experts in the whole wide world, and you can’t even recognize four ghost-hybrids under your own roof! You’re the creator of an entire species and you not even aware!”

Maddie’s eyes were covered by her goggles, but Jack frowned confused, “stop stalking nonsense, spoke! You’re not making any sense!”

“Then maybe it’s time we get some sense into your heads,” Plasmius growled and transformed.

Danny and the audience back at the speeder watched in horror, as two black rings formed around Plasmius’ midsection and reviled the unharmed billionaire.

Vlad folded his arm behind his back with a superior countenance, observing his flabbergast college buddy and former love interest without much compassion.

“But…” Jack stammered and let his weapon hang loose from his arms, “it’s not possible…”

“Your portals made it very possible. Remember the accident forty years back, Jack? I was your first victim,” Vlad said coldly, “the prototype portal created the first two hybrids.”

Nightshade let her own two pink rings run over her body and let Vlad put an arm around her, “and your ghost portal created a third.”

They both made space as Danny stood and removed the hand from his healed eye. The cool feeling of his own two white rings was familiar even though nothing in this moment seemed to be.

His parents widened their eyes as Danny Phantom was replaced by Danny Fenton.

Maddie's staff fell to the ground with a chatter and she removed the goggles from her tearful eyes. Jack was without words and moved to Danny without really seeming to know for what.

Danny held his breath. He had fantasied about this moment and even experienced it a couple of times before he altered their memories or destroyed their timeline.

It all fell down to this. Would his father hug him? Or hit him?

Danny stared into those blue eyes he had inherited and froze when Jack Fenton's bone crushing hug engulfed him. Danny relaxed into the hug and closed his eyes as his father began to cry like a baby.

He opened his eyes and caught his mother's over the shoulder of his shaking father. Maddie dried her eyes, "oh, Danny, my baby…" Danny felt his own eyes tear up as she pulled both of them into her arms and just melted into the hug.

Sam, Tucker, Jazz and Valerie had moved to the scene in the middle of the hall and Dani appeared at the opening to the speeder with a groggy grimace.

She shook it off and ran to her parents with a relieved expression, "mom! Dad!"

Vlad and Arianna pulled her into their midst and Danny got out of his parent's arms.

Without a word, he led Dani to them and placed his hands on her shoulder's, "mom, dad…this is Dani, she's my clone."

"Oh, *sugar cookies*," Vlad groaned and placed a hand over his eyes.

Arianna just shook her head, "she still ours, though. We called dibs on this Phantom."

Maddie hit her husband's shoulder with a wild expression, "I called it! I was right!"

"Yeah, yeah," he grumbled and made sure his shoulder was alright, "but that still doesn't explain anything to me, this is all so confusing."

One of the dusty windows to the halls exploded and made glass rain down on them.

Arianna winced, “oh, yeah, you probably want to take this talk someplace with a ghost shield. We’re kind of under a ghost invasion.”

Vlad grabbed his writs and gasped when he discovered it was without his watch, “no! And I can’t feel my duplicates either!”

They all turned to the Specter-speeder in hope of an escape and watched the spiral of smoke and broken engine with dread.

Tucker was the first to panic, “we’re doomed!”

“Not yet!” Jack grinned and pressed a keychain. An RV Danny had never seen before broke through the doors and park in front of them, “we still got the Fenton-Ghost-Vehicle – 2! It just got back from the shop.”

“Nice ride,” Danny nodded and phased into the RV along with the others.

They all took place on a seat and his parents jumped into the front seats, “everyone remembered their seatbelt?”

“Just get us out of here, woman!” Vlad growled and she tsked at him.

“Safety first, Vlad.”

Jack laughed, “HA! Safety is for punks, BONZAI!”

The RV shot through the factory like a rocket and surprised the siege of Cube guards that had been ready to storm the building.

His dad used on of their ghost vehicles as a jumping ramp and landed hard on the road, making everyone groan and hang in their seatbelts.

Jack ignored all the traffic signs and dodges all the screaming people on the street as the ghost infestation reached its peak.

Danny watched from the window, how the Cubes ghosts dropped the humans they had been interrogated or chasing and started shooting

at the RV. Following it in a swarm that grew for every block they pass.

Arianna's eyes shone black and a herd of shades broke out form her form and phased out of the RV and unto the road. Their persecutors stopped for the fight, but not all and more took their place.

Vlad massages his temples with a panicked expression, "why can't I reach my duplicates?"

"Try harder," Danny yelled as the side road his father had turned to was blocked by a truck and the halfa hurried to turn the car intangible.

Maddie and Jack gasped, before his father threw up his arms and expected to hit the truck in front of them.

When they just passed through it, his father started laughing with a shaking voice and grabbed the wheel again with trembling hands, "alright, got that going, son!"

"Trying!" he yelled back from the backseat and jumped when a white light broke the battle of guards and shades behind them.

Arianna gasped and stared out the window with horror as her shattered shades returned to her as wisps of energy, "oh, fuck!"

"What?" Sam asked without really wanna know and Arianna drilled her nails into the seat.

"They got a group of Fairets faries. They're called "bright ones" and that's not for nothing. They like the opposite of my dark core, they'll tear my shades to shreds with their elf and light-men magic – I can't fight them!"

Vlad cursed a list of snack brands and took over the intangibility. Everyone screamed as the RV phased down the road and landed down in the sewer.

Vlad moved up to Maddie and Jack and forced Jack to keep going, "my manor is closer, just follow that path!"

“But Fenton works is much safer, I mean, do your mansion have ghost shields?” Maddie argued and Vlad sent her an offended look.

“Do yours have five layers of ghost shields and a lawn that electrocute whatever ecto-based there gets near it along with hidden ecto-blasters hidden in the trees?”

Maddie stayed silent and Jack speeded up. A blast from behind told them that the ghosts had followed them to the city’s underground.

Maddie charged her extra bazooka and started dealing out weapons to them all, “this doesn’t make sense, why are all these ghosts after us!?”

Arianna jumped down beside Vlad and studied the gun she was given, “I was a former pit-fighter in an entertainment center back at the Ghost Zone – your son and college buddy here busted me out and now we’re all wanted for the simple price of gold. We’re as good as dead.”

“Not this time!” Vlad scowled and turned the RV intangible and invisible, “take that turn, Jack!”

“Whatever you say, V-man!” his dad chimed and Vlad’s scowl got worse.

“For the last time, stop calling me that!”

A white shining man with a lantern in his hand, jumped down in front of the RV and got caught in the headlights. The man made no move to get out of the way and lifted his shining lantern, where a white flame flared and kept growing.

Arianna threw her hands up, “*NO!*”

A white flash made them all go blind.

Chapter 34

The first sense that came back to him was his hearing.

But not the kind of hearing that give you complete sharp sounds and all the underlying noises it's so easy for you to take for granted. All the high-pitched screams and loud noises sounded like he was under water. Muted and unrecognizable.

Bright white light. Arianna's scream. Car crashing.

The next was the feeling of his body. A warm stream of ticklish drops drove down his face like warm fingers before going cold and sticky. He was hanging upside down and his head was getting dizzy, if the throbbing pain in his temple was not enough to create a headache.

Darkness, then sunlight. Fight inside the RV. Shades hissing.

He opened his eyes and squinted in the bright light coming in from the RV's windows. He blinked as the sight of his own ripped and bloody hazmat suit came into focus and shadows ran past the windows of the upside-down RV.

Danny groaned, still feeling like being caught under the school's swimming pool.

Flashing shots. Pain. Hands phasing in everywhere.

The world came tumbling down, as he forced his seatbelts opened and fell to the glass covered roof. He scraped his white gloves and smeared the frame of the windows with ectoplasms, as he put all his strength into pushing himself out of the cramped space.

The natural light made the pain unbearable and he covered his face. Followed the sticky trail on his face to his hairline and further into his hair roots, something soft and mushy under his nails. A dent in his head.

Was he still in ghost form?

Danny used his boots to kick himself the last way out of the crashed

RV and ignored the glass pieces under him and the felling of skinning his own back and limbs.

The need to throw up came in waves and Danny turned over to lay on the side, telling himself that choking on your own vomit was a lame way to go. He dragged the green gloves down his face to get some of the ectoplasm out of his eyes and found that someone was lying beside him.

Vlad.

All sounds came rushing down like a bomb and Danny gasped as his own voice retuned crystal clear to him and the world exploded in sound. Vlad was panting hard on his back and looked like he had been through hell.

His silver hair was a mess and his face looked like a patchwork of blue and yellow. His hands and long piano fingers was craped over a wound in his midsection and blood was pouring out of his fingers and coloring the glass pieces on the sidewalk.

Danny could see the man's speed healing was working hard to close the man's flesh wounds, but it took all of Vlad's energy. Leaving him to gasp and jerk like a fish on land.

A sitting duck.

Danny eyes wandered and took in the scene behind Vlad's torn and bruised form. Dani and Valerie had taken cover behind a car and returned the fire that was shot after them and made them cower.

An orange hazmat suit caught his eyes next. His father and mother had both been disarmed and a group of Cube guards was kicking his father like a dog on the hard ground, while four held his mother and kept the screaming and crying woman in place.

Keeping her from helping her husband and forced her to watch.

Jazz and Sam was watching with bruised body's and tousled hair, both put in handcuffs and forced down on the road by ten guards, pointing their gun and flaring hands at them. Tucker's legs could be sensed right behind them.

They weren't moving.

"Vlad…"

The beaten billionaire didn't seem to hear him or maybe too many things was one his mind. Danny stretched his hurting head and followed the man's eyes. Nightshade was mowing like a fast shadow in a ring of guards and fought with fangs and claws to get free.

Fast flashes of white made the woman scream like she was stabbed and the shades that grew out of her was forced back into her body with pained cries. More shining elf and shimmering fairies took up the Cube guards places and made a ring around the halfa matriarch.

The white flashes forced her to her knees and soon she was hissing and panting on the concrete and trying to hide from their white flaring bodies.

Danny pressed his ecto-bleeding arms in under himself and tried to stand, or at least sit up. The nausea and pain almost made him black out and he fell back on his side again with a gasp.

A boot came flying and Danny hived without air to gasp, as the guard kick his ribs to keep him from moving, "stay still, scum."

Danny protested breathlessly as more boots came into his blurred view and hands grabbed him and stretched him.

Danny stared up into the stark blue sky and the merciless ghosts above him, as a cold collar was pulled out of the ring of ghosts and clasped around the teen's neck.

A series of angry growls and uncomprehending demands, told Danny that Vlad had just gotten his own slave-collar.

Danny groaned as he was let go and slammed back down on the sidewalk. The ghosts let them be and allowed them to admire each other's new sign of slavery.

The collar around Vlad's and possible Danny's own, was the heavy kind Tucker once had freed Nightshade from and Danny found hope.

Tucker could open those with his PDA.

Danny made a grimace and tried to get up, he had to get Tucker and the others to a safe place for them to save them all.

Sam, Jazz and Tucker was still collar-less as far as he could see and Danny raised his shaking hand. The start of a ghost portal formed behind his sister and two friends, and Danny forced all his will into widening it.

Tucker didn't move as the portal swallowed his head, then shoulder and midsection. Danny pushed with a strained hiss and the portal doubled in size.

He cried out in pain as a heavy cowboy boot slammed down on his hand and made his bones crack dangerously. Tucker fell down the portal without a sound and the portal closed with a snap.

The boot lifted and Danny pulled his broken hand to him with gritted teeth.

Mr. Runner, ghost of the Soul Center, slave trader, auction leader and southern gentleman, smirked down on the furious teen and took in the entire scene as he straightened his white suit and bolo tie, "boys! Boys! Be gently like a mother's hand, or else I can't sell them."

The green ghost watched with a winning grin and had one of his two human slaves lite one of his red cigars, as Jack was thrown over to Sam and Jazz.

The guards let go of Maddie and she rushed to sit beside her beaten husband, "Jack! Say something! Oh, god!"

Runner exhaled a puff of sweet smelling smoke and chuckled as Valerie and Dani's cover was blown to pieces and Valerie was caught by ten guards.

Dani tried getting to team up with her mother, but one of the guards caught her ponytail and slammed her down into the road. Vlad hissed as he tried to get up and Runner gave two of the guards a signal with his cigar.

The two ghosts grabbed Vlad and forced him to his feet before dragging him over to the slave trader.

The man was clearly in pain, but mustered a smile nonetheless, “Runner, how nice to see you again…. have you lost weight?”

“As a fact I have,” Runner smiled benevolent and stubbed his cigar, “nice of a Yankee like Ya to notice – now notice this.”

The fist almost made Vlad’s neck snap and Runner shook his hand with a smirk, “that’s was for insultin’ the Cube.”

Vlad groaned as the next fist slammed against his already blue cheekbone.

“That was for stealing ma’ slave.”

Danny thought he heard Vlad’s nose break and Runner received a handkerchief from one of his twin slaves and cleaned his tainted glove, “and that. That was for drinking ma’ whisky in ma’ own house.”

Vlad crocked his neck and spat on the road with a snort, “no hit for your wife, Runner?”

Runner just shook his head, clearly more disturbed by the halfa’s bravado, than the mention of his dead wife, “Ya more crooked as a dog’s hind leg, Plasmius. But I have to give it to Ya. Ya did ma’ a great service on that scarce-hipped bitch.”

“And I’m sure I could help you again,” Vlad offered, “just name your price and we can talk this out like civil people.”

“Oh, but Ya’ll already so helpful,” the ghost chuckled and walked over to the now collared and straightjacket clad Arianna. He grabbed her chin with a smirk and turned her head from side to side, “look at that! All healed and pretty as twelve acres of pregnant red hogs.”

She hissed as he clapped her head, “looks like it’s just you and I now, Doll. And now that I’m a free man, I got some ideas for –”

He pulled the hand to him as she turned to Nightshade and snapped

after him with sharp teeth. The ghost frowned and snapped his fingers at his guards, “still a biter, huh? We can fix that.”

Nightshades eyes turned wide as two guards came up to her with a black helmet. A perfect copy of the one she once had worn during her time as a slave.

“No, wait! NO, Please!”

Runner ignored her pleas and cries as the guards seized her up and grabbed her hair to get the helmed down over her head. The halfa’s screams got muffed as they locked the helmet on the trashing woman and Runner turned satisfied to the rest of them with a casual smirk.

“Well then, looks like I got ma’ slave, a new catch of ghost-hunters and some words out of ma’ system.”

“I can repay you,” Vlad insisted and tried getting out of the guard’s hold, without success, “you know I have the money for it – I pay you ten doubled.”

“I’m sure you would,” Runner smirked and watched as Danny and Vlad got their own straightjackets, “and I’m more than willin’ to let you and the boy go, but I have ma’ orders. You really made the Cube lose their vertical hold. They want Ya’ll heads on sticks, that’s sure’nuff.”

One of the ghost guards placed a leash chain in Runner’s hand and the ghost pulled Dani to him with a grin, “but I thank Ya for this little darlin’ here. I didn’t get those breeding samples Ya’ll promised, but she’ll do. Very generous of you, Plasmius. Such a Doll.”

“YOU GET YOR HANDS OF HER, YOU BASDART!” Vlad roared and received a fist in his stomach.

Runner took no notice of him and the guards dragged him to one of their black vehicles.

The five white clad fairies, better known as the “bright ones”, flew up to Runner. The leader with white butterfly wings was flanked by the stark white woman, a divine woman with floating white locks like glass.

Clearly none of the fairies trusting the ghost and the group gathered around their leader to protect her.

The leader crossed her arms, “we have done the Cube’s bidding. It’s time for us to return to our freehold.”

Runner pulled a bag of his shoulder and threw it to the fairy woman. She caught it midair and the other bright fairies secured that the gold inside was real.

The youngest, an elf boy looking like something straight out of Tolkien’s universe, smiled with bright teeth and bite into one of the coins, “yo, that’s acceptable.”

Runner turned his back on them without a care and got one of his Asian slaves to light him a new cigar, “alright, boys! Put Phantom in his own wagon and get those hunters locked up, haven’t all day!”

Danny groaned as they lifted him and dragged him to his own Black Maria. Sam tried kicking one of the guards and get to his gun, but without luck. Runner grabbed her hair as the others got seized up.

“I remember Ya, the little home-tamed,” he chuckled and ignored her angry replies, “so feisty, would have got me a fine price on the action, but now that I see you a hunter…such a shame.”

Danny wanted to yell something, making it stop, but couldn’t muster the words. His speed healing was working at its peak and took up all his energy reserves.

He trashed and struggled to get free, tried making another portal and control the panic attack that was building up, but even he had to accept the fact that the situation was out of his hands.

The guards ignored his weak attempts as they slammed him against a hand truck and Danny’s head hit the metal.

He felt the cold chains restrain him as the last light went out. -

Sam huffed as her back hit the cold black stone and she rolled out of the way in time to safe herself from being crushed, as Mr. Fenton was thrown into the cell next.

Mrs. Fenton followed next, crawled to her unconscious husband and dragged him to the black wall for support. Jazz and Valerie got their haul flight next and the air was slammed out of them as the Cube guards closed the cell and secured the human shield.

Making the black cell glow an ominous green.

Sam ignored her cuts and bruises, even the new slave collar around a neck, as she moved to sit beside Jazz and Valerie. Shared their concerned look. Jazz crawled to her mother, “mom? Is he…”

“Your dad just out hanging a little,” Maddie said, trying to look brave for her daughter’s sake and hid her tears from their sight as she adjusted her goggles, touching her own slave-collar, “just…. help me get him upright.”

Sam sighed and opened her battle suit to get her tanktop. Valerie got the hint and did the same with her white undershirt.

Maddie looked up in surprise as the two teens started ripping their black and white fabric into long strips and offered them as bandages to the woman. Maddie blinked perplex as the three girls started patching her husband up with trained hands and cold effectivity.

None of them showing any disgust or act of tears, as they behaved like it was just another Tuesday.

Maddie watched over their shoulders, as Jazz made a perfect sling for her husband's broken arm, her face a mix of worry and astonishment, “when did you girls –”

“Danny used to come home with a lot of wounds on daily basis, after his ghost fights and battles,” Jazz replied without missing a beat in her work, as she secured that her father’s ribs were still whole, “he has speed healing, but unless he wanted to make the bedsheets green and red every night, he needed to learn how to put on bandages. I helped him before I moved to college.”

Sam just nodded and Valerie pulled out a flask of water from her suit to wash the blood of the man’s face, “I had myself to train on. Funny how practice pays off when you least expect it.”

Maddie covered her mouth with her hand, “but…Danny said those bruises and scrapes was from school fights…”

“He lied,” Jazz sighed and gave her mother an apologetic look, “I’m sorry, mom.”

Maddie looked like she was ready to disappear into her own misery, when Jack coughed violently and grabbed his daughter's hand.

The woman made them give him some space and soothed his cheek, “oh, Jack…”

“Maddie?” Jack asked strained and got help to lean on the black cell wall, he took in the place with clear confusion, “where are we? Last I remember we were in a fight?”

“We’re in the Ghost Zone,” Sam replied and got the pairs utterly attention.

Jack almost seemed to forget he was in pain, before coughing again. Sam looked around in the dark cell and watched as two Cube guards passed outside the human shield.

“It’s called the Soul Center,” she continued slowly, “it’s far into the zone and some kind of ghost town for interdimensional travelling. Like some kinda mid stop for all supernatural interties that travel the zone. I visited it when we went to rescue Arianna. She was a slave here…all humans are slaves here.”

“Not ghost hunters.”

They all turned to the left as the gravel voice spoke up again, “they’re not keeping me or you here as slaves. We’re just here for a fight.”

The man moved closer to the transparent shield between the two cells and pulled down his racked hazmat hood and goggles, revealing a tired face of war wrinkles and black hair and beard that could use a razor.

Sam had no idea who the ghost hunter was, but the Fenton pair gasped in unison and moved to him.

Maddie tried taking the man's hand, but the shield zapped her and made all further physical contact impossible, "Dave? Dave Miscavits? What are you doing here?"

Jack looked behind the man and found more cells full of hazmat and combat clad humans, "yeah, what are you doing in here? You were supposed to meet us at the ghost hunter symposium last fall, Buddy."

Dave just smiled without real joy, "took a quick job on the road two stops from the symposium. Got told over the radio that some people had been kidnapped and wanted to investigate really quick. Seems like I was the one that got busted this time. Those ghosts are good. Too good for ol' Dave here."

Sam mad sure no soundless guard was in hearing reach, before turning to the man, "don't worry, we get you and all the other hunters here out."

The man just chuckled amused, "don't worry, little lady, its already taken care of as we speak. Before you guys joined us, we were informed to get ourselves ready."

Valery frowned confused, "for what?"

"Nightshade," Dave replied and toss his head to the left.

They all turned to find the Cube guards assembled before a row of screens outside the cells corridor. A picture of Nightshade in a helmet turned up and the speaker started talking.

Dave nodded gravely, "the only way out of this hell hole is through the arena outside. Through that ghost. Apparently, she has fought and killed ghost hunters for years. The cells here are just for her stash of human opponents, all though…I've heard that we're more slaughtering pigs than real threats to that spook."

The teen's shared a worried glance and moved a little back into the cell, as they entrusted Dave and the other ghost hunters to the Fenton pair.

"This is bad," Valerie whispered, "if we don't help the other hunters killing Arianna, they might turn against us in that arena. We can't tell

them she's half human and pregnant without spilling her secret!"

"Some of them will probably try kill her nonetheless if they knew," Jazz figured and watched the screens as Plasmius and Phantom's pictures turned up next, "what the hell are they planning with them? Where is Dani?"

"Probably with Runner," Sam whispered and saw Valerie tense, "if we're lucky, he's just keeping her in that leach and nothing more, but we have to get them out of those collars, before making any rescue plans – Tuck, do you have your PDA on…"

The teens suddenly realized that they missed a person in their midst and searched the cell. Sam felt the panic take hold of here, "Tucker?"

"He fell," Jazz suddenly said and patted the ground with an intense look, "Danny must have made a portal for us to escape. Tucker got out of the fight, his still out there."

Valerie and Sam shared a wide grin and Sam felt hope return, "alright, he'll bring the back up, he finds a way."

"But how?" Jazz continued anxiously, "if he fell through one of Danny's ghost portals, he will be somewhere in the zone. If he survived the fall, he's without a weapon, handcuffed and lost. The guards took his PDA from him before they beat him unconscious!"

"Silence!" one of the guards yelled and hit the shield. The teens scowled at him, but kept shut till the ghost had moved back to the screens.

Jack coughed again and Jazz helped her mother get him back up against the wall. Maddie sighed as she took place beside him and secured him a little warmth in the cold cell.

Jazz settled by them and glanced to the neighbor cell, "you guys didn't spill Arianna's secret, did you?"

Maddie shook her head, "no… but even if I told them, how many of them would hold back fire?"

The pair shared an ashamed look, "I know we wouldn't. A couple of

hours ago, a half ghost would still a ghost to us, I guess."

"And now?" Jazz asked and waited for them to finally show color.

Jack watched the screens with determined eyes, "Arianna is family, just like Vlad and your brother. We made them, we have to take responsibility for them no matter what they have done in the past."

Maddie shook her head in anger, "I still can't believe Vlad was that Wisconsin ghost all along, what fool we've been!"

"We've all been," Jazz consoled and took their hands, "but the only thing that matters now, is that we all get out of here in one piece."

Maddie squeezed her daughter's hand, but didn't seemed sure, "Jasmine, honey…when did you find out about your brother? Did Danny tell you?"

The red-haired teen, soon woman, took a deep breath and sighed, "it's a long story…"

"I love long stories," her father joked and coughed again, "you know how I like to babble, I'm sure you can do that after."

Jazz pushed her hair out of her face and tried to find a place to begin, "okay. You guys remember the day the ghost portal started up all by itself, right? Well…Danny kind of activated it."

Sam left Jazz to tell the strange tail of her boyfriend and turned back to the screens. She really hoped Tucker had made the fall to the Ghost Zone and got a plane, because truth to be told…she got nothing.

"Come on guys. I can't save the day every time."

Chapter 35

Danny tried to phase out of his collar and gave up the strategy in favor of his ice powers.

He waited until the entire collar was frozen, before he hammered his chin down against it and gave himself a purple bruise.

The collar held.

Vlad hadn't taken his eyes off the VIP box window view for a second, but Danny could smell the smoke from the part of the collar Vlad had tried to burn away of his own.

But just like Danny's attempted to freeze his, it had been in vain – but not without a single victory, as the guards had been forced to change the man's straitjacket when it went up in flames.

Something told Danny that the older halfa would had fired a series of snack based profanity of right now, if it hadn't been for the volume of ectoplasmic goo the guard had slammed over his mouth.

Runner seemed to have had enough of the insults and negotiation attempts – in general, he had had enough of Vlad. That was something Danny could have associate with, but didn't applaud at the moment.

They were both healed now, thanks to speed healing, but the electroshock Runner let them taste through the collars, had a strange entanglement on Danny's ghost core and he felt weak and haggard after the fifth shock.

Made it hard to be strong when you could taste your own guts.

Danny glared out from under his sweaty locks of hair and rocked restlessly on the hand-truck he was strapped to. The guard behind him gave him a slap on the head and Vlad's jaw tightened.

The younger was pretty sure he heard a tooth or two breaks over from Vlad, when Runner finally made his grand entrance along with his two Asian slaves in white.

The two slaves were just as lifeless and passive as Danny remembered them and served as a stark contrast to the struggling and snarling Dani who was dragged in after Runner in a chain.

She looked pissed, but unharmed – that is if you ignored the collar connected with a chain and the ghost at the end.

“All right Ya’ll let’s get this rodeo started and get them spectators and sponsors happy. This place is as busy as a funeral home fan in July!” he commanded witty and sat in his chair with a clear view of the arena under them.

Dani was planted at his feet and disappeared out of Danny’s sight, since the collar and the guard prevented him from turning his head any further.

He wanted to tell her it would all be okay, but something told him it would be too far from the truth. Danny immediately gave himself a mental slap for being so pathetic.

Get a hold of yourself, Fenton!

He glanced over to Vlad again. Plasmius always had a plan, he practically had to with all that training over the years.

The billionaire was an expert when it came to come up with crazy longterm planning and scheming after defeat after defeat, preplanning over and over again, without breaking a sweat.

Danny knew better than anyone that if there was anyone who was a master of planning far beyond plan C, D and E – and actually carry it out with some success – it was the man beside him.

"An opening game to the Cube’s honor?" Danny asked nonchalant as if he and Runner was on good terms.

He considered adding "if it had such a thing", but something told him that such an adding would collect him a new electroshock and he kept prudently his mouth shut.

The ghost crossed his legs with a lit cigar, “smart as a whip, aren’t Ya, Looker? But I’ll say this is more for ma’ honor. I think we can

take it from here, boys – take a stroll."

The two ghost guards left the VIP boxes without a word and Runner settled with a calm grunt.

Bellow them, the two access openings into the arena opened and out poured dirty and ragged humans, who hurried to get together in a secure group formation.

Danny frowned and recognized the different levels of ruined rags the slaves under them had tried to patch together through months of imprisonments.

They were all ghost hunters.

Danny was confused at first. He had expected some sort of ghost fight like last time he had visited this dark place, but when Nightshade's picture kept showing on the screens as the opponent, a red bulb blinked in his head in screaming alarm.

He suddenly remembered back to the horror stories Arianna had told about her time in the arena and understood this was like one of the private matches, where ghosts would put her up against a group of ghost hunters to see her maltreating and devour them.

Just...this wasn't a private match. It was the opening fight…

Would they force Danny or Vlad to do the same? Danny knew he could never do it, no way, not even if they threatened him with death (his parents could be down there for heaven's sake!) But it was an entirely different story with Plasmius.

The older halfa could be ruthless and would go to extreme lengths to win – but even after all they had been through, Danny nether could or would imagine Vlad for a cannibal.

But still…Danny had to admit he had once taking Vlad for the vampire type and how far was the line actually between cannibalism and vampirism, when all is said and done?

Danny checked the group for his family and friends, but found none of them. They had to be trapped somewhere in the Cube. Danny

didn't like to think of it as for later use, but the thought never left him entirely.

What if they forced him to fight his own parents? What if they made Vlad fight them?

The last ghost hunters stumbled in and assembled in a strong close ring of bodies, as if they expected to be attacked at any time from all sides. They froze all as one, when a new gate opened and a gurney with weapons flew in.

Seeing that the gurney was for them and the weapons their own, the hunter hurried to arm themselves and returned to their battle formation. While the humans toppled the gurney to use as cover, the commentator shoot of form the speakers in an overly cheery voice.

"That's right, folks. The opening battle will be an open show match between hunter and specter. Fifty of the world's most advanced ghost hunters have been collected for you to see and must now fight to the death against none other than the Cube's own unbeaten champion. The returned five double gold champion, never defeated and most winning ghost to ever anticipate in the Cube ever, if not the most favored halfa ever to step into our glorified arena – We present to you, Nightshade!"

Nightshades image appeared on the screen again and was followed by several clips from past battles, where she had defeated an opponent. The audience went crazy in glee and the arena shook during the power of the applause.

Danny heard Vlad gritted his teeth in rage and somewhere behind them, Dani gasped. Danny felt little drops of sweat running down his back. Fifty armed ghost hunters against one single pregnant halfa? *Really?*

Danny's eyes darted toward the Cube's spectator entrance and hoped to see Tucker and Sam coming storming in with drawn weapons and a safe plane out of here.

This couldn't happen.

He couldn't take it anymore and decided that pleading would be

worth it and Danny dared to open his mouth, "Runner you can't do this! You end up killing her!"

Danny got an electric shock in response and screamed in pain. Vlad glared and rocked furiously on his hand-truck.

Runner just shook contentedly on the head, "ma' little lady has been takin' more than fifty ol' hunters before and got plenty of arrows in her quiver left – and if I remember right, she was sick as a dog passing peach pits back then. I'm sure she can handle those little humans down there."

He buried a hand in Dani's hair and pulled it to her great discomfort.

"And thanks to Ya'll, she's no longer a rare birdy in the ghost nest. Now I have an extra and can take chances."

Dani bit him and Runner hit her furious, before electro-shocking them all. The all groaned in pain, while the hunters down in the arena below them turned to face the entrance reserved for Nightshade to enter.

The commentator continued his peppy presentation of the different humans on the field, while a countdown ticked down on the largest of the screens.

Danny followed timidly the countdown's path towards zero, while the hunters gathered in their battle formation and shouted to each other about cooperation and strategy.

Every living and undead soul in the arena held their breath as the clock hit "2". Danny gripped the handtruck's ironsides at "1" and Vlad stared ahead as the clock reached "0".

The gate of the southern end opened and the crowd yelled and screamed for their unbeaten champion. They had to wait a little since there appeared to be commotion down in the port.

Danny squinted to see and when he wasn't the only one getting a bit confused, one of the screen's zoomed in on the gate to get it all. Nightshade finally appeared in the dark of the entrance, but was apparently doing her best to get back into the dark.

The screens kept zooming in on her as she seemed to be squirming desperately to fight against the ghost shield that forced her forward and into the arena.

Danny watched as she fought to press her shoulder against it and tried to push it back or herself through it without much result. At some part of the whole abduction thing, they had taken her long slender coat from her and she looked small without it.

She continued to fight the shields, before turning to a last resort and pressed her back to it, pressing her feet against the ground and pulled long streaks behind her in the sand.

"…Looks like our favorite specter have some problems with stage fear, ladies and gentlemen," laughed the commentator heartily to hide his own confusion and made the spectators laugh it off, *"let's chant for her and help her a little, shall we?"*

The crowd began to chant her name, but that didn't seem to change Nightshade's act of heart and she continued to struggle.

Danny got a lump in my throat by the sight of her useless efforts to get out of the arena, that had haunted her dreams and waking moments for ten years. Her efforts were in vain and despite the fight, the shield gave her one last shove and she tumbled into the arena.

The ghost hunters gave her not as much as a shadow of a chance and started shooting at her right away without mercy.

Nightshade's face was hidden behind the helmet, but it was clear for everyone to see that she was terrified and struck a protective hand over her stomach. The small gesture got Vlad to see red and he clench his teeth together so hard it sounded like they would break. Danny could nothing but watch as Nightshade were hunted down in the arena like a wild animal and his prayer to Tucker and Sam grew.

Where were they!?

The female halfa was continuously beyond help and fired her ghost-ray without any real goal at first and did everything to get out of their range of fire while she ran up and down the shield and flew

hither and thither.

A black shield was formed in front of her stomach and she attacked more focused now that she had found a way to protect her midsection.

Vlad observed her like a hawk and the teenager could only imagine how he must feel by seeing his wife and unborn child fight for their lives without him being able to lift as much as a finger to help.

The champion was meet with a roar from the crowd as she divided fifteen times and took the upper hand of the battle. Several of the hunters were swallowed up by her hissing shades and Danny winced from their screams, a sound that only seemed to excite the audience further.

All around the arena, the audience cheered like a living ocean of hunger for entertainment and gore. There were no free or empty seat to see for miles around and even the stairs seemed to be occupied by spectators.

The meaning of the term "full house" seems to be evident here.

The weakest of the hunters had now been eliminated from the game, but a smaller core of the toughest of the hunters fought their way around the wall of shades to go for the original ghost.

Nightshade, who until now had let her shades fight for her and hid behind them, didn't discover the group until it was too late. The leader got her on a clear shooting range and fired a number of shoots.

A shade threw itself in front of her only to be blown to nothing and Nightshade started dodging for all she was worth.

Danny didn't want any of the hunters to die, but if he could he would still be shouting to Arianna that she had to fight them and stop running. If she continued like this, she would soon run out of juice or wore herself out and become an easy target.

just wanted her out of there, but knew that she would not be a possibility before the fight was to an end and settled. By death ...

Sam…Tucker…Jazz…just somebody! Anyone really!

“Please help us, Clockwork,” he whispered quietly while Nightshade struggled to build up a thick shield between herself and the hunters.

She seemed to be winning the fight, but went back into hiding rather than attacking again, much to the frustration and disappointment of the rows.

“I think this have gone far ‘nuff now,” came it tedious from Runner and he moved up to the window with a remote control in his hand.

"Don’t!" Danny snarled, but Runner just ignored him and pressed a button.

All shades at once disappeared and the hunters gathered in confusion for a moment before they had merged their forces again and went on in unity on the now defenseless Nightshade.

Danny saw her pounding on her helmet in rage to get it off, but there was no use, and she went back to her strategy of zigzagging and evade all the shots that came in her direction.

“New gadget to the helmet, let me control her asses to different powers,” came it talkative from Runner, who twisted and turned his remote control with an impressed nod, “those boys I sent in to Ya portal and lab found some pretty interestin’ inventions, Plasmius. And I say, it’s unbelievable what ma’ folks can make from that Yankee stuff.”

He patted Vlad on the shoulder and got a burning glare in return. Runner should probably pride himself fortunate that Vlad was chained and strapped securely in every way possible.

The midnight blue eyes promised a fate worse than death and Danny was pretty much convinced by now, that Vlad could lead those promises into reality, with or without ghost powers.

Danny saw rapidly from the arena, where Arianna zigzagged in the air to avoid gunfire and back to the slave trader who just watched his slaves struggles with a placid smile.

"Rare or not rare, she's still your slave right!? I mean…don't you lose money if she dies, or something?"

Runner ignored his frantic question and pulled Dani to him with the chain. She landed hard on the floor and the ghost pulled her up by the hair, to get her to sit up like a good dog. She responded to that treatment by spitting him in the face.

Runner sighed heavily and removed the slime blob (damn, Dani ...) with the green handkerchief from his breast pocket. He gave them all a long tired look and shook his head in disappointment.

"I have tried bein' patient with Ya Yankees. I have been fair and even been friendly to Ya'll. I have treated Ya like ghosts, rather than that dirty half-breed scum everyone takes Ya for," he scowled pointed to each of them with the threatening remote control and frowned with a countenance as strict as a parent scolded his rebellious children, "so Ya wanna act like humans? Fine! Then I treat Ya like humans and make Ya'll an example."

He pressed another button and Danny closed his eyes in anticipation of something worse than an electroshock. When nothing happened, he opened tentatively an eye and found that he was the only one who is not looking down towards arena.

Danny turned his head. He should soon realize that he was right to fear. Something much worse than an electroshock had occurred.

Nightshade could no longer fly.

She jumped hopelessly around on the field to the sound of the audience's laughter and tried to take off from the sand without success.

Her minor panic attack lasted barely a few seconds before one of the hunters grabbed her from behind and another came towards her with a drawn ecto-stick.

The hunter that held her arms behind her back, yelp in confusing when she swung her legs around him and threw him over her back.

The hunter with the stick was knocked out by his flying companion

and both ended up being chocked when the stick ended up in between them. Nightshade appeared to be done playing nice and jumped them.

The audience screamed in anticipation and Runner pressed another button. The mouthpiece of the helmet slide away and Nightshade seemed to have expected that much.

She seemed to have lost the last piece of humanity, returning to the instincts the arena had taught her and grabbed the nearest hunter with a furious snarl. The hunter screamed as she planted her canines in his throat and clawed him with her nails.

A jet of blood followed when she tore of a piece of the hunter's throat and his partner fought screaming to get away. She gave him no chance and pulled him back with a secure grip around his ankle.

Runner chuckled as she digged the claws into the hunter abdominal muscles and began to tear.

Danny fell like throwing up. The screens zoomed in to get every detail without mercy and Danny wondered just how many spectators that watched along outside the Cubes rows.

"Mom," Dani whispered in terror and gripped convulsive her hair in distress.

Runner huffed amused, "you think she's your mother, doll? The next is probably that you call him daddy and that one big brother," he said with a shaking head, pointing amused to Vlad and Danny.

“Fuck you,” she sneered angrily and Runner looked straight at her for a second, before he pressed the remote control again. Danny widened his eyes when Arianna now lost the ability to use her ghost-ray.

“Wait! She didn’t mean that! – please!”

Another push of a button. Nightshade’s intangibility disappeared while she was phasing through the sand.

“Why did you–!? Just stop!”

Nightshade's three eyebeams stopped and the group of hunters that had been stalled by it, moved closer, while she digged in panic to get free of the sand.

Vlad threw his head to get the teen's attention and Danny turned panicked to him for help. Vlad's eyes were narrowed in anger and a furious muttering could just barely be heard under the ecto-goo.

"What?" parroted Danny quietly, keen on helping and getting help. Vlad nodded from the arena to Runner, who was inspected the show underneath them with amused interest.

Danny shook his head in incomprehension and Vlad nodded down himself. Danny followed his gaze, but all Vlad pointed to was his straightjacket and feet.

What was he trying to say? That he was itchy? What!?

Vlad nodded more forceful toward the arena and Danny frowned.

"Nightshade?" he asked in a whisper to be sure it was the first part of the message.

Vlad nodded and began to cradle his arms. Danny grasped nothing, since Vlad's arms stretched around with the long sleeves. He looked kind of silly.

"…uhm…dancing?"

Vlad gave him a look that surely said something downgrading about Danny's IQ and rocked more indicating now. Danny made sure Runner was not aware of them and continued the game.

"Shaking? Hurt? Cramps? …Carrying?"

Vlad cradled his arms more insistently now, with an encouragingly gaze and struggled to get his message through to the teenager.

Danny stared at him, tried to understand. Cradle arms ... something you did when you were carrying something ... carrying something heavy? Nightshade ... carrying something ... carrying a…

“Baby?” he parroted questioningly and Vlad gave him a grave nod.

The man gave a hard throw towards Runner now and Danny understood. He had to tell Runner she was pregnant.

He didn’t know.

Danny bit his lip. There was a great chance that Runner would stop the fight if he found out she was pregnant. It was a free halfa for him to sell, train or put in to his business or something.

If the child was a boy, he could even use it for future breed on Dani (Danny had to mentally stop himself and his cynic train of thoughts. He sounded like some slave trader. What was wrong with him!?).

But what if the Cube didn’t like the thought of Runner sitting on all the halfas? What if they confiscated Arianna right away and moved her before they could escape and get out of here?

What if they had to spend a lot of time in this place before the help got to them? What if the killed Arianna…or worse? Made her abort?

Danny shook his head in distress, but Vlad held his gaze with intensity as titanium. Not giving him a choice in the matter.

Danny made up his mind and trusted that Vlad knew what he did (wow, something else he never thought he do). He turned to Runner and swallowed a mouth full of air to begin his sentence, but Runner was faster and lifted threatening a finger to the remote.

“Really? Ya wanna try my patients further, little Looker? Do it, I dare Ya!”

Danny opened and closed his mouth like a fish on land and Runner’s finger jumped warning every time he tried to form a word. Down in the arena, Nightshade had finally crawled out of the sand and fought against the remaining hunters with her bare fists.

The leader got a chain around her throat from behind and lifted her a few centimeters from the ground.

She fought back with kicks, while she struggled with the shoelace

and broke it with her ghost strength. She landed heavily on all fours in their midst and tried to get back on her feet with ragged breath.

The hunters had her surrounded now and a ecto-riffle was smacked against her helmet and forced her back down.

The helmet protected her face, but she seemed to be more concerned about her midsection and put an arm around her stomach before she threw a shield up around herself. The hunters began to beat and shoot at it like crazy with their weapons. Soon long cracks run down the black bubble. They grew larger and longer for each beat.

Danny counted to three in his head and spoke faster than he had ever done in his entire life, *“shespregnant!”*

Runner gave him a confused look, "huh? Who’s a pegan?"

"She’s pregnant," Danny corrected and repeated slowly this time.

Runner returned his glare, “Ya lying to ma’, boy? Ya take ma’ for as dumb as dirt?”

“No,” Danny answered in a serious tone, "she is in the fourth week. If you don’t do something soon, she’s gonna abort down in that arena. "

Runner looked down towards the arena where the shield broke and seven hunters pulled Nightshade out like an unwilling pig at the slaughtering. They held her tightly while the biggest of them began hitting her in the face with something that resembled his father's ghost gloves.

One of the hits came dangerously close to her stomach and Runner grabbed Danny hair.

“If Ya lying, Ya gonna regret it, boy.”

“Call of the game,” Danny retorted grimly and returned the ghost’s stern glance.

Runner released him and drove panicked a hand through his own hair. He stormed out of the VIP box and the three halfas could only watch as the hunters continued their treatment of their Arianna.

Exactly ten minutes should go before all the hunters were electroshock by their collars. Nightshade collapsed in the middle of the sand, now that there was no one to hold her up and grabbed convulsively for her stomach.

Runner and ten ghost guards moved in and got her carefully placed on a floating stretcher before they hurried out of the arena again.

The audience had been absolutely ecstatic during the last part of the match, but booed now enraged and began to throw trash, while the commentator confused trying to come up with a reasonable explanation for the interruption of the fight and calm the angry crowd without success.

Dani got her leash free of the chair and hurried up to them. She removed Vlad's goo and Danny sighed now that the rush was over. The older halfa moved his sore jaw and watched with a frow, while Dani tried to open their restraints without success.

All she got out of it was a painful shock and something could indicate that Runners remote control was the only way out of their restraints. A remote he had taken with him as he had just gone with Arianna to an unknown location.

"What will happen now?" Dani asked quietly and Vlad got a look that did not suit him one bit.

Uncertainty.

He masked it quickly with his normal grasped demeanor and spoke soothing while Dani tried to rectify his tousled ponytail, "not something we cannot figure a way out of, sweety."

The moment of family bonding was broken like a soap bubble, when everyone’s favorite slave trader stumped back in to the VIP box.

The ghost laughed heartily at something and regained Dani’s chain, despite her fight for freedom and took a friendly grip I both Danny and Vlad’s shoulders.

“Alright, Ya two – who was it?” he raised his eyebrows teasingly, “who popped the cherry as they say and put a little cinnamon bun in

the oven?"

"What?" Danny asked in surprised disgust and Runner pointed a finger towards Vlad with an open grin.

"So it was him! " he chuckled and patted Vlad's shoulder, making the hand-truck jump, "couldn't keep Ya hands of her could Ya, you dirty old Yankee – could Ya? Took Ya'self a little slice of that juice black –"

"You dare talk about my wife, like that, you dirty oaf!" Vlad sneered fuming and Runner frowned with thin lips. His grip on Vlad turned from friendly to hurting and his voice got low and dangerous.

"As much as I'm thankful for a nuther free halfa in my herd, Plasmius, there's a little problem I just can't get ma' head around. That little biter migh' be a nigger bitch, but she's ma' nigger bitch and therefor ma' property," he said lowly and leaned to Vlad's ear, "do you know what I do with Yankees who touches ma' property, Ya filthy halfa?"

When Vlad didn't ask, Runner huffed with a cold smile, "well…we'll get to that after the fight, won't we? Ma' money is on Ya, by the way."

Danny looked up in confusion, "what fight?"

Runner was beaten to the word by the returned commentator and they all watched as the screens changed from total confusion to focus on pictures of Phantom and Plasmius.

"We apologize the confusion, but it seems that a little complication was to blame in the end of the match – the Cube regret this interruption and wishes to inform that today's tickets will be extended to the final match in an hour. Ladies and gentlemen, hold on to your seats and get ready for another battle that will go down in the Cube's history. For the first time ever will two halfas step in to the arena and fight to the death. Mortal enemies and rivals of Amity park, Minnesota! – Danny Phantom versus Vlad Plasmius! The battle of halfas!"

Danny and Vlad turned their heads and looked at each other simultaneously.

Danny lost his breath, “fuck…”

Chapter 36

The arena underground was as cold and gloomy as Danny remembered it.

The massive black stone walls and pale torches gave out a chaotic sphere of cold flickering shadows and no viable light, that could light up the long corridors and lonely cells.

The false pale light would have gotten any creature without night vision to run in circles with no sense of direction, or hope of escape and caught as he was in his human form, the teen felt dread seep into his bone and thoughts like a deadly disease.

Danny knew these walls would be impossible to phase through as ghost like the rest of the Ghost Zone – unless he ran through them as a human being, but that would mean a very slow ascension and the whole idea of the collars kept human slaves from doing so.

So he focused his escape plan instead on finding the easiest route back to the arena and impregnated all corridors, twists and turns they were brought down in his mind.

It soon proved to be an impossible strategy, when he lost sense of direction for the fifth time and something told him that the guards knew what he was planning and confused him intentionally. That or the walls were alive and moved by themselves.

Probably the latter.

Danny tried again to squirm out of his straitjacket without success, while Vlad, chained unto his own hand truck, tried to keep a low conversation with the guard who pushed him.

Vlad made a pretty convincing job out of bribing the guard and promised him with more gold than he could spend on an afterlife in return for their freedom, but without success.

The guard ignored him without a word or change of facial expression and even Danny could see it was no use. These guys could have been

mindless Cube zombies with a self-interest resembling that of an ant for all he knew.

The tour ended at something that turned out to look like a sort of guard station and a large uniform dressed ghost with red side-cut and eye patch awaited them with arms akimbo.

He watched them with the same mannerism as a housewife coming across cheap food in a supermarket long past its expiration date and scoffed. Danny knew he and Vlad looked like crap, but put up a brave face anyway.

Vlad had already his pompous smirk back on his face and they faced the big guard without any trace of defeat.

The one-eyed guard snorted dryly, “the human world must really have been emaciated, if this is the best they can bring me now – so you girls are supposed to be the great legendary hafas, huh?”

The guard took a hold of Danny's arm to his protest and probed his muscles, after which he grabbed Vlad’s jaw and examined his teeth. Vlad cursed furiously, but the ghost made him effectively silence with a hit of his baton.

"Pathetic. A tiny ice princess and Countess Dracula. You make me sick. Do you scum know who I am? "

“Captain hook?” Danny replied challenging with a grin and Vlad snorted.

"Aptly, but not quite, my boy. I guess what we see here is the Cube's own slave warden and prison guard. I believe my wife have mentioned you. How's the knee? "

The slave warden's face changed from blue to purple and his decorated collar looked as if it would choke him, as the veins on his neck swelled with rage and ectoplasm. Danny eyed the ghost’s metal leg.

He remembered vaguely Arianna having mentioned something about a slave warden from the times when Jazz had gotten her to open up during one of their numerous therapy sessions and Danny had

eavesdropped over his homework in the kitchen.

The guy was apparently the one who trained ghost slaves before they entered the arena and ensured their equipment and weapons in cooperation with their owners. If Danny understood right, warden was only one suit and a rulebook away from being an exact copy of Walker.

But where Walker kept his prisoners behind bars and incredibly complicated and unjust self-written rules, the slave warden here was the eternal executioner who decided where and when it was time for a slave to be sent up to the arena.

His way of selecting a slave's first match, was often determined by his own vagaries and how much he wanted to see a slave dead.

Arianna had told a story or two about how a slave who had answered back or proven weak in training, had been brought up before time and had met a painful death.

Karma had come around for the warden during a slave revolt, where all the slaves had been stopped by automatic ghost shields, that had caught them in small closed boxes of ghost shield until the guards came to bring them back to their punishments and cells.

The slave warden had been unfortunate enough to be caught in one of the enclosure with no less than five of the most brutal of the slaves.

When the guards finally arrived, the five slaves had already pulled his leg of, raped him twice each and forced him to pluck out his own eye.

The five slaves had each met a dire final by the hand of the warden, but their deaths alone had never really seemed to be enough for the slave warden and the number of deaths in the arena had increased dramatically since that day.

Danny didn’t know whether to feel sorry for the ghost or not, but he was starting to get a bit pissed as he was brought back from his inner monolog, by a hit in the face with the warden’s stick. A warning for

not paying attention it seemed.

Danny spit out a tooth and decided this ghost might have deserved every second of his suffering.

“Pay attention, scum. I’m not repeating myself, get it? You two have exactly one hour before your grand entrance and although I personally would let you starve for a day or two to make you desperate, Runner have ordered that the two of you get a last meal – that say, a last meal for the loser of course. It’s up for you two to decide that in an hour. So what will you require?"

"I doubt that your canteen can offer me anything suitable for my taste," Vlad retorted in simply arrogance and harvested another hit from the ghost baton.

"Unless Runner pays me under the table tenfold, I'll personally make sure that you will be starving for the future till you begging for toilet water, bat-shit," the warden murmured lowly and turned to Danny.

“And you, what would you like for your last meal, scum?”

Danny put up an innocent grin, “I’ll take a book on how to escape from slave-prison.”

The Warden rose an eyebrow, “…that’s not food.”

“Duh, yes it is – knowledge is food for your brain.”

Danny knew Tucker would have been proud, but the Warden was another story. He pushed Vlad out of his way and made both the older halfa and the hand-truck he was bound to fall hard on the stone floor.

Danny’s own hand-truck was close to follow suit, when the warden grabbed him by the neck and brought him face to face with the one-eyed ghost.

The ghost’s sudden series of movements and violent momentum was substituted with an almost excruciating silence and Danny began to sweat against his will, under the slave wardens burning look.

The warden's grip around Danny's neck tighten slowly and the ghost showed him his small sharp teeth.

"You little punk. You think I haven't dealt with smart-mouthed brats like you before?" he asked dangerously low and crocked his head.

Danny looked into his eye and felt his mouth dry out. He had heard about people freeze or lose control of their limbs, when getting face to face with a dangerous predator, but never experienced it himself before now.

Something in that ghost's red eye reminded him about Dark Phantom's empty hallow madness. The depth of noting but the pure wish of infliction of pain and suffering on others seemed to fill the vast space between the red and black depths of the iris.

There was no reflecting light in those eyes. No life, no humanity, no mercy. The warden seemed to read the teen's fear like an open book and forced Danny closer, almost rubbing their noses together.

"Here's a little secret, halfa-trash. The funny ones always die first and if they don't, they stop. Being.

Funny."

"Do what you want," Danny retorted with more bravura than he actually was worth – clinging to his sarcasm and wits like a last resort as he always did when faced with danger, "you can beat me, starve me – Hell, you can torture me for all you want, but I'm not gonna fight Vlad or anyone else. It's not gonna happen. You won't get a halfa fight."

"Trust me," the warden sneered with a humorless smile, "it's going to happen. We have our ways down here. You have spine kid, no denying that, but you don't have a say in the matter."

Danny yelped as the chains dissolved into nothing and he fell face first down on the floor. Vlad was already on the floor and got back to his knees a little more graceful than the teen, who ended up settling beside him with a broken nose.

The cells that Danny had thought empty until then, came to life as

various slaves of ghost origins crept up to the bars and watched them with hollow eyes.

The warden ignored them and the mute ghost guards around him, “as the warden and prison guard of the Cube I’m going to make myself clear. I won’t tolerate weakness.”

He jeered at Danny, “I won’t tolerate rebellion.”

Vlad narrowed his eyes to match the wardens look and the ghost continued slowly, “but most of all. We don’t tolerate halfas.”

The slaves jittered in their cells and all as one cowered when the warden slammed his baton against his metal leg with a cold leer, "you’re dead souls. You’re always be dead souls. You wake up, fight and go back to sleep. Repeat. You know who repeats and fight in here? The dead ones. Welcome to the Cube, scum.”

The slaves shivered to the sound of those words and an echo of weeping and wailing swept down the cold halls and corridors.

More haunting than any sound Danny believed any ghost could produce and the sounds filled with the very soul of the big black cube with one single emotion.

Hopelessness.

All Danny’s spite disappeared like mist in the sun and he realized that this was really happening. He was a slave now.

If there had been any chance of rescue or help, it would have been hours ago. No one was coming for him, ‘cause everyone was here with him. His parents were stripped of all arms. His friends and sister chained or lost to the Ghost Zone.

Dani was reduced to nothing but a pet and somewhere Arianna was waiting for her child to be born and snatched from her arms.

Even Vlad, the man Danny would have put his faith in and trusted to get them out of any situation, was broken and bleeding beside him in a matching collar and straightjacket. No one was going to do the impossible this time.

No surprise rescue arriving at the last second, no trumping ghost hunter invention would interfere the certain danger, no cosmic master of time would scoop in and safe the day.

For the first time in Danny life, he was utterly and fatally at his enemy's mercy. He was a slave now. They all where.

A new addition to the party floated in by the doors to the guard station and seemed to have made it his personal mission to brighten the word up with his wide smile, light robes, and yellow Amor curls.

"Heard that you guys needed my service," the blond ghost chimed and leaned his slender hand on a hip.

A golden lyre was strapped to the ghost's hip by a golden belt and Vlad widened his eyes, "oh *fudge buckets*."

"What?" Danny asked with rising panic and inspected to string instrument in confusion.

The warden gestured to the two halfas, "we have a fight in an hour and those two needs to actually *fight* each other. Do your job, Thamyris."

Thamyris face lighted up and went over to expect them with interest.

"My, my, maybe calling them archenemies was taking it to far by our speaker. Those two look nothing like rivals. But I guess it's a beautiful thing really," he continued with dreamy eyes, "rivals turning into friends and overcoming their differences and hatred. Makes you believe in the second chances and love, doesn't it? Like fate decided to make a work of art!"

The many ghost guards' poker faces turned slightly embarrassed, as the Greek ghost began to dance around and throw little blue flower petals of ecto-energy around. The slave wardens face turned purple again when a flower crown was placed on his head.

He waved angrily to get the blue energy to dissolve and erase all evidence he had been crowned, "just get it over with and get out of my quarter, you flower fixated bastard."

The harsh tone didn't seem to hit Thamyris the slightest and he covered his smile with a delicate hand, "all for you, mister Warden – accept this piece of music as my deepest apology –"

All the guards jumped out of the way with covered ears and the slave warden stopped the lyre with a bone crushing grip around the Greek ghost's wrist.

He dragged the ghost to his face with a glare that could kill, "I've said it before and now I say it again for the last time – Don't. Ever. Point. At. Me."

Thyramis was still smiling, now just a little more on edge and lowered his lyre.

"All right, all right," he grinned and jumped light on feet to the two halfas, "still an honor to play for two such legendary halfas like this. I think I make a song about it."

"Just do it!"

Danny eyed the lyre and Vlad looked around, desperate for an escape.

Danny smiled a little miffed up at the blond ghost, "nice thing you got there…heard they're good at cutting cheese. I actually think I want a grilled cheese sandwich for my last meal."

Thyramis smile turned up by Danny's joke and he started singing with a high vocal that seemed on the edgy to belong to a woman, *"I have witness my wonders, I have breath live to miracle. I stay true to beauty and the art of the miserable!"*

"Daniel, don't listen to him!" Vlad yelled and Danny looked confused from the lyre to the man beside him.

"Why!? What's going on!?"

The blond ghost turned a golden screw on the lyre and continued his song, *"Immortality shall be for those of honor, happiness for the fallen lovers. I stay true to ugly and the art of dreaming murders!"*

“It’s audiokinesis!” Vlad yelled, trying to tune out the song, “it’s ghost hypnosis! We have to get out of the lyre’s ray or destroy it!”

Danny’s mind fell back to the first time he had crossed ties with the ghost Rock-star Ember McLain.

The short time span he had spent hypnotized by her guitar had not been something he had recalled with good memories and Danny had hoped that would have been the first, and only time he lost control over his own senses.

Danny was pushed aside as Vlad tried to kick the lyre out of the ghost’s slender hands, but the blond ghost saw it coming and moved out of their reach with a teasing glint in his red eyes.

“Enemy to friends, lovers to rivals. Two souls drowning, one bleeding for love, one seeking acceptance. Such a lonely dance. Such a destined chance! An eternity to glance! NOW TAKE A STANCE!”

The sound waves hit the two struggling halfas and Danny was toppled backwards by the power of sound. The music was gone, but Danny’s mind was still blown to pieces and he groaned, as a hand grabbed the back of his head and forced him to turn his head.

Danny’s mind was blank like white static and he opened his eyes in confusion. A pair of midnight blue stared back and the two locked eyes.

None of the two halfas took mind of the blond ghost that had turned their heads or the smile of pleasure and power that spread on his face.

Thyramis had served the Cube for more than two thousand years and fiddled his golden lyre to get many a ghost to fight for the honor of the Cube.

The brutal and glorious battles often reminded him of small glimpse of his past life in Athen and felt him with power beyond any pleasure he could ever have achieved as a mortal.

But this ... the Greek ghost could feel the two halfas emotions run through him like a hurricane. Never in his long immortal life had

tasted such a force. So much passion and hatred between two ghosts.

As a music and demon ghost, it was in his nature to find nourishment in others feelings and express them as he did with his music. The network of emotions that bound these two halfas was about to take his self-control away.

The young Phantoms soul ran like cold ice over his skin and the uncontrollable fire that burned in Plasmius got Thyramis insides to burn up.

Ice and fire. Light and darkness. Good and evil. Love and understanding. Life and death. Innocence and experience. Bravery and power. Black and white. Green and red. Young and old. Youth and arrogance.

And so, so, sooo much ***Hate***.

Danny Fenton saw the man ahead of him and with the lyre's power a new clarity in him, simple emotions and desires opened and filled his being. Made his vison turn raw and sharp like never before.

Anger permeated his soul and frustration ran deep in his mind as cold and painful as icy river streams.

Plasmius.

His arch rival and arch-enemy in this cursed existence on the edge of life and death.

Ever since Danny had ended in this nightmare of half-life, half-death, this man had lurked as a perpetual danger and served as an enemy, a threat to all Danny hold dear and had fought for.

With his numerous humiliations, insults and temptations, Plasmius had terrorized Danny, his fragile life, his friends' safety and family happiness for personal gain and selfish power.

Danny clenched his teeth. Plasmius had crept into his life like a poisonous snake and made every moment of Danny's life an eternal trail on the verge of decline. His constant harassment of his mother. His vilification and vindictiveness against his father.

Two ignorant souls trapped in this madman's web of lies, plans and destruction, born by greed, hatred and delusion. The many battles, defeats, lies and loss burned like cold ice in the teens vein and brought a snarl to his face.

Plasmius was the eternal enemy in person and memory. When The older halfa was present, he would darken the teen’s hopes and work for good, righteousness and peace.

Always reminding Danny about his weaknesses, fails and force the teen to witness the man’s ghostly superiority.

When Plasmius was gone, he kept reminded Danny of his pestilential presence though the teen’s own countless failures and mistakes, that constantly reminded him of his lack of control and powers the older halfa could offer him if he sold him his soul.

A dire, but sometimes tempting offer that would awaken Danny’s deep insecurity and daily stumble in the dark to get his life as halfa to make sense.

As a man hanging over the cliff, Plasmius would offer him a hand, but always for a price. Always making Danny doubt himself, always make him question the things he believed to be right. Make him fear himself.

Make him fear one day losing to the temptation and become the very being he had seen kill all he cared about. Never giving him a rest or chance of normality. Danny's mind fell into a soup of anger, hatred and hurt.

It was clear as day now!

Plasmius was to blame!

He was the constant threat not only towards Danny loved ones, but Danny's own fragile future. It had been Vlad who sowed the seed of Dark Phantom. He had tried to kill his father, his sister, his friends.

He had enslaved the only other halfa Danny could seek guidance from and cut of Danny’s chance to gain control of his power. He had created, manipulated and brainwashed his clone and cousin. Use both

women against him and tricked Danny into false security.

Plasmius had let them all be enslaved, beaten and brought to certain death or worse. Plasmius had brought them all here with his schemes and greed for power. This was Plasmius fault.

Every problem, every defeat, every failure Danny had failed to fix.

The man in front of him was to blame. Danny had to end this. Vlad Plasmius had to die.

Vlad Master saw the boy in front om him with new eyes and felt as if this was the first time he saw clearly. The waved of the lyre had opened up for hidden lairs and old scars that held his being.

His fire core fueled his tired body with electricity, making his veins run fast with adrenaline and will to destroy.

Phantom.

The nuisance and eternal thorn in his eye. The despised fruit of the union between his lost love and the detested Jack Fenton. The eternal proof that Vlad had failed and still failed.

He had been fair to the boy, offered him guidance, power and a place at his side as his son and apprentice. A more than generous gesture – and how the boy had repaid him?

Phantom had devoted his life to stand in the way of each plot Vlad had spent years planning, lie in the way of all his chances and smallest hope of obtaining what rightfully belonged to him.

The boy could not even be used as material for clones or being able to give Vlad a chance to get the one thing the boy had denied him from the beginning. Phantom had single-handedly murdered his own clone and stolen Vlad's daughter from his side.

Turned everyone against him and still believed himself innocent. Accused Vlad of being insane, mad, old, alone. *A Fruitloop*.

Vlad have let him interfere with his happiness for too long. He was done giving more chances, extent more hands. Phantom had tried to

take his wife from him and turn his reclaimed daughter against him, but it would all end now.

Vlad knew now for sure that there no longer would be anything keeping him from overcome the line, that was the abstinence that had kept him from squeezing the last inch when he held the boy's fragile neck between his hands.

The man had his own family now. Arianna was with his child. She would give him the son he longed for. Phantom was no longer needed.

Vlad might be in the weakest state he had ever been since the beginning of his transformation twenty years back, but with or without his missing army and power source of duplicates, he would finish the task before him.

He had to remove the boy once and for all. Take the full step towards victory and forget all mercy. Danny Phantom had to die.

The warden watched as the guards dragged the two roaring halfas to back to each hand-truck. Forced them apart and separated the two fuming slaves, soon arena fighters.

The two halfas fought to get free and fight the other, completely lost to the rest of the world and anyone else. Entirely focused on the other and their will to end the others existence.

This would be quite the fight.

Chapter 37

Dani’s fingers were bleeding.

The red color lay thin and sticky at the edge of her cuticles, highlighted her fingertips in a foreboding way she could not put into words.

Dani had gradually lost her voice due screaming, shouting and desperate attempt to penetrate her please and tribulations through the VIP box’s thick glass.

The taste of blood on her tongue was heavy and tacky, but it didn’t keep her from chewing on and tearing her dwindling nails with her teeth.

Self-harm was of course no solution to her current captivity, even she knew that, but like an animal in a compact cage, she had run out of downright self-control and fallen back on the old habit of biting nails.

She had bitten them down when she originally lived on the streets for necessity's sake, to keep them short and clean. Now she bit them down as a result of anxiety.

Her ghost powers could heal her hands as if they had never been damaged, but nothing could stop the gash that had torn her heart. As far back as Dani had been able to remember, she had dreamed of the day she could rely on a family.

Knowing she belonged to someone and would be missed by someone if missing. Knowing she had a home. Someone to share a home with.

And what a home she had found.

The home Vlad and Arianna had given her had been everything Dani had hoped one day to achieve and was still more than she could have ever believed herself worthy of.

Even if it had been without all the wealth, the fancy clothes, the three-course meal and warm bed of the best materials that could be bought with money, it would still have been everything Dani had

ever dared to dream about.

The people who created the home was the essential and the home she wanted.

Vlad had hurt her once, she had seen him as her enemy and fought him for a time, but shortly he had proved to become the man Dani always had image as the protective and caring figure she could call Dad.

She had forgiven him and found something far better than resentment and revenge. He was the roof of her home. Keeping her dry and safe from the pouring sky.

Arianna had before their encounter brought Dani to the border of jealousy in the match for Danny's affection, but after their encounter it had been clear to Dani that Arianna had love and understanding enough for more than just one Phantom.

She had pictured the mother Dani had whished for in her cold sleepless night, when she longed for company and someone to hold. Arianna was the foundation of her home. A warm and loving floor to keep her well.

Dani knew it was greedy, but she had pictured Danny to be part of it to. Him living with them and be part of the family. It was only natural, she guessed. They were all halfas. The only halfas. None of them shared blood, but they shared something else, something unique.

Soon they could add another halfa to their midst and the home would grow. Her home would grow with the gift of trust and reciprocity. All of it, a precious gift to her.

A gift she now had been deprived of.

"Stop it! Stop it! Just stop it!! "she shouted desperately and forgot all about her nail biting in favor of hammering on the window again.

The two combatants down in the arena ignored her – and everyone else for that matter. To them, she might as well have been non-existent, nothing more than yet another shout that filled the arena’s

spectator rows, as the fight progressed.

Tears of frustration blinded her sky-blue eyes and got the green and pink ghost-rays that collided with the arena's shield to appear buoyant and unfocussed.

Her collar buzzed and Dani gasped trembling for breath as she sank to her knees after the electric shock.

Runner gave her barely enough breathing space to recover from the pain, before he pulled hard on the chain attached to her collar and dragged her back to her place by his cowboy-clad feet.

Dani hived and coughed as Runner ignored her, focusing entirely on his conversation with the cupid-like ghost guy who was sitting by his side in one of the seats.

"A bit of a number ya did on the two, Thyramis. I thought the crowd would topple the rows when Plasmius broke two of Phantom’s ribs. Now ain’t that somethin’! I don’t think I've ever seen two ghosts show this much fightin’ spirit and thirst for blood on equally foot before."

The blonde ghost called Thyramis waved flattered, but humbly with his hand.

"I cannot take all the credit. My music may direct the emotions, but it is the interior of those who undergo it that creates the true art. The two halfas have unlimited amounts of luggage in their emotions subconsciously. All I did was taking aside their inhibitions and let the passion flow free. What you see down there, is their own plain animosity and yearning to determine a battle between them once and for all. They must really hate each other."

"You’re full of shit! You planted the hate in them not the other way around!" Dani yelled furious and screamed under the electrostatic shock that followed.

Fascinated like a kid at the zoo, Thyramis placed a hand under his chin and with smiling eyes resting on her, as to see what she would do next.

"Such passion. Hafas really is a force of power."

"Go fuck a goat-man," she hissed back and the ghost laughed, making his blond curls bounced.

Dani craved to break her leash and climb onto the ghost's lap. Press her thumbs against his beautiful red eyes and squeeze until either eye-juice or ectoplasm colored her bloody nails.

She couldn't stand what she saw down in that arena. Her father and cousin had worked so hard to make peace with one another and finally turned their rivalry into something conciliatory. They had built a fragile but mutual relationship and finally put their battles on the shelf.

They had both laughed at the table, when Dani had cracked one of her stupid jokes and she had heard them discussed silly names for the baby growing in her mother.

They had ruined five kitchens together, walked the endless halls of the castle of Wisconsin with endless talk and helped Dani train her powers without ever coming to agreement of whenever is was cheating to strike first or not.

He had seen the two male halfas look at one another with nascent friendship and no longer tried to hide it.

They had fought so hard to get to an understanding. To become better than the past.

Now they fought only to kill the other.

Dani could and would not believe this to be their true nature. She couldn't accept Runner's jocular comments about bad blood there could never rest, or Thyramis chatter about hidden feelings only his lyre could wake with its music.

Dani hoped – no KNEW – that this wasn't her Vlad or Danny, just as she knew it wasn't her Arianna who had ripped the throat out of those people in the previous battle. They looked, sounded and had the same names as her family, but they weren't the half-ghosts she loved.

They were not themselves here.

It was this place, this arena and the two ghosts behind her. It was their work all together. The many spectators on the rows and the morbid commentator that rang in her ear as poison.

One and all of them were part of the spider's web that had tied her family and shaped them into monsters. Turned them into daunting soulless shadows of themselves and the substance of nightmares that shook Dani in her soul.

They had torn something sacred and pure out between the fingers of Dani and anger colored her vision. She wanted revenge. She wanted her family back. She wanted to go home.

Danny Phantom hit the arena’s ghost shield with a resounding slap and rose back in the air of the arena with a grimace of pain and steeped anger.

He shaped an ice scythe with cynical stiffness and swung it without the usual playful attitude or words of a silly pun, which had always been part of him.

He turned the blade of the scythe in order to slice his opponent from foot to crown, without the slightest warning or openness to surrender.

All that was left of Danny Phantom was his thirst for victory and self-righteousness, a twisted would view that demanded blood. Vlad Plasmius dodged his scythe blade with an almost animalistic snarl and formed a thunderbolt of electricity in an attempt to pierce the teenager's heart.

Stop it permanently.

Gone were the normal superior ease Vlad carried himself with and almost demeaning reflection he put into his choice of attacks, when he knew he only had to contend with one hand on his back to overcome a clearly lower opponent.

There were no words between them, no room for frills. No soul in the way they fought.

Danny took Vlad's attack with an angry scream and hurled them both

down toward the arena's sandy ground to get the upper hand. Vlad was too weak to turn them around in the fall and took the falls impact.

The many duplicates that had served as his army and held his natural power reserves, still hadn't returned to him or shown signs of doing so.

Unknown to him, they still rested in the thermos Clockwork had caught them in on the order of the Observants and would continue to stay out of the halfa's reach.

Danny took advantage of his opponent's weakness and hammered away with all the powers and ghost attack he could muster.

They had never been so equally in strength before. Vlad had never been so weak an opponent either. By now, they both knew that Danny had an equal chance of victory this time.

The teen showed no mercy as he nailed Vlad to the sand with a blade of ice. Dani placed trembling her hands over her mouth as Vlad screamed in pain and anger, impaled to the sand by the shoulder.

He struck Danny with a flaring fist, getting him of him and bared his teeth in the struggle to pull the long wedge of ice out of his flesh.

Dani didn't have to witness more (oh thank god), as her attention was turned towards the door of the VIP box and two guards brought the now healed Arianna in.

The black helmet turned to Dani immediately and Dani stretched her arms up to her with tear in her eyes. More than needy to return to the familiar embrace in this chaos that surrounded her. Runner stopped Arianna with an effectively flick of the hand.

"Sit."

The female halfa let her outstretched hands fall and moved subservient to the spot in front of the chair, as Runner had designated his flicking fingers.

He watched his now kneeling slave, while the two Asian human

slaves behind him came up with a cigar and a new bestowed glass with two fingers of whiskey.

Thyramis observed with open amusement, as Runner took a deep drag of his red cigar, leaned forward and blew the smoke out over Arianna’s black helmet. She didn’t move an inch.

“Ya gave me a bit of a heart attack, doll. Ya knows that, right?”

Arianna didn’t answer; however, speaking would have proved impossible with the helmet on anyway. She just lowered her head. A clear sign of submission.

"A real surprise it was. If Plasmius wasn’t a halfa and tharfore'd perfomed as part of our old agreement, I would probably have done somethin’ rash. But let’s forget all that, now. Did he hurt ya? Did he lay his hand on yer purdy li'l head? Did bad thin's ya didn’t like?"

Dani shuddered from the sound of the ghost’s tender voice and seethed in anger as he laid a possessive hand on her mother's collarbone and stroked her with something that could resemble ownership.

Even Thyramis seemed to be a little embarrassed on Runner’s behalf, as the slave trader continued his subtle sweet talk and led Arianna to the floor space on the right side of the chair.

Dani winced on the floor on Runner’s left side, watching as her mother endured the ghost’s inappropriate touches, patting and groping.

“I have big plans for ya gals," he continued and planted a firm hand on Dani’s dark tresses.

Stroking both of them gently, but with an edge of hardness.

"Trimenjus plans. Now that there’s no longer a woomin in the house, we can git the two of yo' installed for fine. And soon we’ll git a small one to think about to. Mah own li'l flock of halfas, mah small pesky dolls."

He patted the black helmet and tightened his grip in Dani’s hair, as

he addresses Arianna.

"I'll trust thet ya'll make a li'l lady outta this one, doll. Hevvin knows she is crazy like a mad weasel in heat, muss be all that Phantom gene. Porely junetic material I tell ya. Ya were right to choose that Yankee Plasmius. I look fo'ward to havin' a mixed core in ma' collection. Imagine, a mix between a witch-ghost and a vampire-ghost. Fire and darkness gonna be an interestin' fushun."

Dani had a biting remark ready on her tongue, but turned silent when Arianna's hand slipped behind Runner's feet and landed on top of Dani's smaller hand. Her mother squeezed it gently but insistently.

Dani understood. Don't make Runner angry.

The teen let him babble all he wanted and focused on the feeling of her mother's gloved hand. Arianna's other hand rested on her lower stomach and Dani imagined childishly that she could feel a connection to her future sibling through her mother's right hand.

I'll get us back home, she promised decisively. *I'll get us all home. I promise.*

Runner brook into laughter by the sight of the battle's climax. -

Danny blinked the ectoplasm and sweat out of his eyes and sent another five duplicates out, surrounded the wounded, but dangerous halfa in the middle of the arena.

The duplicates shifted quickly to camouflage the original Phantom and encircled the older halfa. Plasmius snarled furiously and eyed them all with wild wrath, while a band of electricity woven sparkling between his hands.

Danny knew he was building up an electrical discharge and derived the halfa with the two duplicates in front of him, in order to sneak up behind him.

Danny sent two ecto-disk against Plasmius exposed back, but the older half-ghost had already seen through his tactics and turned intangible. Broke out of the circle. Danny bared his teeth and changed tactics.

Instant attacks it was then.

All the Phantoms fired their ghost-rays at random, forced Vlad into a wild dance of dodging and shields. The tactic wasn't further elegant, but forced Plasmius to spend his energy on small parades and thus lose the accumulated energy that was meant to recharge his weapon.

Plasmius phased into the sand, trying to hide until his next attack and charge it with energy in peace – but Danny would have none of that. He shot after the halfa into the sand and seized him down in the darkness.

Plasmius buried his claws in Danny's back and fangs in his neck in defense. Danny screamed in pain and threw Plasmius of him. The older halfa was quickly back on his feet, ready to fight Danny without blinking.

Danny pulled his duplicates to him to get more energy, but focused on shaping shields and parades, trying to save some strength.

His body ached under Plasmius' attacks and even though most of the green and red specs coloring the sand was Vlad's, Danny had given his share.

His back was a web of pain and already wet with Ectoplasm, Vlad hadn't been able to get a good enough hold of him to rip the flesh of his neck, but the bite was bleeding heavily. Draining him of power and Danny blinked as the arena blurred before his eyes.

A strong backspin kick broke his unfinished shield and hit Danny on the side of the head. He barely registered that he was sent backward and into the sand, before his world went dark and stars danced before his eyes.

"Foolish" Vlad jeered and flew up to the dizzy teen.

Danny croaked as a black boot was heavily planted on his windpipe and grabbed the boot desperately, as Vlad placed all his weight on him. Danny forced himself to focus through the obscuring veil that threatened to engulf him completely and let go of Vlad's foot.

His fist flared and he sent it to the vulnerable side of Vlad's knees.

The older halfa grunted in choking pain and collapsed beside him. Danny inhaled a much-needed breath of oxygen and swung his legs up to a kick against Vlad's face.

The kick sent Vlad to the ground, but the next kick that was meant for his temple was effectively stopped by a gloved claw. Vlad's broken nose furrowed in a hateful scowl and the green ectoplasm ran from his nose and mingled with the portion that already colored his bared teeth.

He spat something that resembled blood and Danny gasped as the claw turned his ankle in a hard motion. Broke Danny's ankle with a loud snap.

The audience howled in bloodlust and shouted Vlad's name, as the older halfa staggered to his feet and caught Danny by the hair. Danny was hurled to the arena shield and screamed as the barrier electroshock him.

Vlad was upon him in a second and threw him towards the other end. Danny couldn’t get to his feet before the bone had healed and was an easy target for Plasmius’ whims.

Danny gasped frantically as Vlad seemed to have had enough of throw him around and lifted him up by the neck. Danny wriggled to get free, his fractured and healthy legs kicked helplessly under him to escape.

Vlad scowled when Danny hit his shin and pushed the dangling teen against the shield, forcing him to endure the electric waves running through his body.

Vlad could endure it by redirecting its electric core, but Danny's ice core didn’t stand a snowball’s chance in hell and squirming against the shield in gagging spasm. The crowd shouted and screamed, demanded an end to the fight of the century.

The man began to tighten around Danny's neck without as much as a change of expression and the red eyes stared mercilessly into the dilated pair of green, that slowly became bloodshot and taken over by the green veins that threatened to burst.

Danny gurgled convulsively and tried to pry Vlad's hand off. Vlad snarled in response and added the other hand to ensure the pressure around his neck. Tightened forcefully and pressed against the two major arteries to stop all ectoplasm and air.

A tactic that would only continue when Danny shifted back to human.

Danny could already taste his human blood on his tongue and feel the two rings shape itself around his middle. Victory shone in Vlad's eyes and he increased the pressure to achieve the ultimate goal.

He closed the aching eyes and tried to remember something useful in his last seconds of consciousness.

A short blurry image of a woman with long pink hair appeared on his retina, but even though he couldn’t remember the connection between them or the context of the situation, he recalled the grip she had made around about his neck and showed him how he could escape it.

Danny turned sharply his head to the side and felt Plasmius grip slackened by the weak thumbs. Losing their power and secure grip. The young halfa inhaled sharply and threw his head back.

Plamius' eyes widened in timorous understanding when Danny opened his mouth and expand the lungs to their limit. The first sonic tone of his Ghostly Wail had already escaped Danny's lips before a sensation of burning iron shot through his throat.

Danny lost the connection to his power and grabbed Vlad's burning hand in sheer panic. Pink fire pressed against Danny's neck and melted their gloves, but the older half-ghost continued to brand him and Danny could smell burnt skin and hair.

His own.

Danny ignored the throbbing pain of his half-healed ankle and planted a firm kick between Vlad's legs. The crowd winced loudly and Danny's part of the fans cheered as he crawled away from the kneeling Plasmius.

The teen coughed and colored the sand in a mixture of red and green. He stroked the clutching part of his throat and tried to focus beyond the burning blistering feeling of having gotten his vocal cords overheat.

It had a certain similarity of heartburn ... just hundred times worse. He uttered an incomprehensible sound and could taste his own burned flesh.

The humiliation came after the pain. His strongest most powerful ghost power had been stopped, his last trump card prevented and left him defenseless.

How dared he…

The teen turned his flaring eyes to the other halfa. Plasmius was slowly returning to a standing position, however staggering and visible limping.

Pink smoke steamed from his nostrils and mouth, his body looming and ready to jump the teen and punish him for his actions. Vlad roared and threw a sparkling ghost-disk against Danny and the teen escaped with a shout.

They both rose to the air and Danny dodged the disks, before building an ecto-blast and shot it after the furious halfa. Vlad took a stand, not moving one bit and flared his own hands with energy. Danny cursed for his stupidity when Plasmius caught the ball with a grunt.

Danny threw himself out of the way when Vlad turned the ball from green to pink and send it back to the original owner. The arena's sand splashed as the blast collided with the ground and the shield sparkled cautionary. -

Dani had covered her eyes with a hand and tried to get control of her rolling stomach.

The sight of Danny's melted flesh still in fresh memory. Nightshade squeezed her hand hard, as Vlad and Danny ran out of ecto-energy and succumbed to a plain fist fight instead.

Above them cheered and applauded, the two ghosts in the VIP-box was still well entertained by the two halfa women's anguish and fighting men's wrath.

A low hiss built up under Nightshad's helmet and Runner whacked her in the back of the head to make her behave and continued his conversation with Thyramis.

Dani send both ghosts a nasty look. It was useless, but still the best ammunition she could muster in her current puny state.

With the electroshock inducing collar around her thin neck, she was as good as a human and the same applied for her mother, who wasn't only trapped with a collar, but a power-controlling helmet.

It would take a miracle to get them out of this mess and if Dani had to be honest, she had only seen very few miracles in her short period of life. But there were few.

Her mind wandered to Valerie in an effort to tune out the violence behind the box's windows and humiliation of her mother.

Was the huntress okay? Was she, Sam Tucker, Jazz and Danny's parents? Was she hurt? She had seemed hurt, but okay last time they saw each other, before they were dragged in each direction.

But many hours had passed since then and Dani had the feeling that the other's conditions weren't that much better than her current one.

Possible even worse.

A low buzzing got Dani to sit up straight. She blinked perplexed by the vibration and placed a hand on her jacket pocket.

She had received a text message ...

A quick glance to Runner and Thyramis assured her that they were still deep in their bets on the outcome of the bloody match, while Nightshade was still focused on the fight and squeezed Dani's free hand whenever one of the two male halfas injured one another.

Even the two Asian slaves seemed too immersed in their own empty

dreadful expressions to devote Dani and her mobile any further interest.

Dani bit into her bottom lip and slipped a hand into her white leather jacket, one inch at a time. Her little gloved hand closed around the phone and she slipped it down between his legs, where none of the other ghosts would see it, or at least she hoped so.

Dani eyed the phone with disbelief, she'd completely forgotten all about it and the guards must had missed the possibility of her carrying a mobile in her ghost form, as they had settle for the search of her human form alone.

Dani wasn't even accustomed to own a mobile in the first place, rarely using it before Valerie and had only acquired one since both Vlad and Arianna had insisted on getting in touch with her at all times.

Dani had scuffed in sweet amusement by their clear affection and wish to protect her, but now she could nothing but thank them for having given her this golden chance of contact to the still free world.

The phone had surprisingly signal and she opened the test message. It was a hidden number and written succinctly in the same way as a manual. Looking a lot like those receipt you got after having purchased at an electronic store or web shop.

Special design Ghost Collar "hybrid" version – code design 66, Cube generated

Controlled by one-way remote: buyer registration - Dick Runner Junior the 3th.

In case of malfunction or other unfortunates, please contact store

For instant release of slave, use the onetime infrared code.

- Hidden number

Dani looked up to make sure she still hadn't been detected and activated the phones infrared with trembling hands. She waved it around her neck slightly for a few seconds, not knowing quite what

to do when a small click almost made her heart stop and she opened her eyes.

The collar was open.

She hurried to catch it before it hit the ground and pushed it back toward her neck. It stayed if she hid the open lock behind her hair, but she would surely lose it if she moved too quickly or bent forward.

It surprised her that no one in the box had turned to her with suspicion, as loud as her heartbeat and breathing sounded, but she supposed it was only in her own ears. A sigh of relief escaped her.

She was free.

What now?

Dani thought quickly and tried to come up with an instant, but sustainable plan. She couldn’t screw up now.

Not when there was a chance of getting out of this mess. Runner struck a roaring laugh due to something happening in the arena, but Dani had no time to be offended and focused on her plan.

One of Runner's cowboy boots almost stomped her and Nightshade’s hand and they rushed to pull their hands to themselves. Dani stole a glance at her mother.

If she didn’t get the collar around Nightshade’s neck of, before Runner discovered one of his halfa were free, they would surely use Nightshade against her, either by fight or as a bargain chip and Dani couldn’t escape without her, no way.

Dani tried if she could sneak behind Runner's chair and get to the older halfa, in order to give her the phone, but felt with a gasp how the collar was almost torn of her neck when Runner automatically pulled the chain.

Dani quickly seated herself again and prayed that he hadn’t noticed how loose the collar had become. It didn’t seem like he’d noticed anything, as the southern ghost continued to laugh at the fight and Dani saw green.

Runner was gonna pay. Big time.

Dani tried a new tactic, as she pointed with the infrared towards the unsuspected Nightshade, but it didn't seem like the signal could stretched that far and maybe it was best if her mother wasn't surprised the collar self-deactivating and was caught by surprise when the collar landed in her lap.

She had one last plan, but she felt sick just thinking about it. She was gonna need a lot of water, soap and possible bleach to wash it off, if she was ever gonna face anything ever again and most of all Valerie.

Dani sighed in dread, but if there was no way around it ...

Runner's laughter stopped abruptly when Dani got up from her place on the floor. He was about to pull the chain and give her an electric shock for contradict his orders, when Dani stepped in front of him and climbed onto his lap with a sweet smile.

Runner blinked surprised, but a smug smirk soon spread below his walrus mustache as Dani pressed herself against him and let him plant a possessive hand on her waist.

Nightshade looked just as surprised as Thyramis, but unlike the musician, her attention quickly turned to the mobile which discreetly had been thrown down into her lap.

Dani forced herself to continue to smile as Runner began to grope her and watched out of the corner of her eye as her mother read the text messages and deactivated her own collar.

She camouflaged the collar's clicking with a girlish giggle as Runner ran a hand up her thigh. A glimpse of his collection of remote controls emerged from the inside of his open jacket and Dani recognized the wide black remote that matched the helmet.

Dani didn't exactly possess the greater knowledge about remote-controlled devices or ghost technology, but as far as she was concerned you could disable the helmet by smashing the remote control to pieces.

If not, then it would certainly be a whole lot harder for Runner to

control her mother without it.

Dani couldn’t see Nightshade’s eyes, but a small determined nod told her that shit was about to go down. The girl nodded back and forced Runner's attention back to her with a hand under his chin, while Nightshade crept over to the unsuspecting Thyramis.

"Ha! This doll is as cute as a calico kitten on down south," Runner chuckled goodhearted and pressed Dani closer to him.

Dani eyed the remote and stretched her hand towards it. It was at the same moment Thyramis chose to lean forward in order to get closer to the window, caught a glimpse of Dani's fingers reaching towards the remote and opened his mouth to warn the Texan.

A flying fist hit his jaw with a cracking sound and Nightshade pulled him down by the hair. Runner rose from his chair in consternation and overturned Dani from his lap in the commotion.

Runner pulled out his collar remote and pressed it several times before it seemed to dawn on him that neither of his two halfas was collared anymore.

Dani sent him crashing against the wall with a strong ecto-blast from behind and threw herself into the fight, where her mother was trying to force the harp from the grips of raging Greek ghost.

“Don’t touch it, you dirty heathers!” he screamed in panic while Nightshade struggled with heels and nail to pry it out of his long slender finger.

Dani remembered too late that her mother's powers were still disabled by the helmet and searched around in desperation for the fallen remote-control. She found the remote at the middle of the floor and glided down the floor for it.

She reached it and rushed to press as many buttons as possible. A blast of dark ecto-ray informed her that Nightshade had regained her powers and Thyramis wailed as he eyes was sapped by her three eye-rays.

A heavy cowboy boots came rushing down and Dani was a few inches

from crushing her fingers, as she pulled her fingers to herself in the last second. Runner seized the remote triumphantly and pressed the big red button down.

Thyramis and Nightshade screamed in unison as the waves of the electricity ran through the helmet, its carrier and on to Thyramis, whose hands were still locked on the halfa.

The strings of the lyre jumped to life and emitted a high-pitched sound that made all the presents eardrums to rupture, while the glass windows cracked under the heavy pressure.

The lyre rose into a teeth-crushing octave, whose waves turned the seated spectators of the arena deaf for a couple of seconds, as the glass to the VIP-box burst into a thousand splinters and the tone cracked the supporting pillars.

Runner seemed to had regained enough to his senses that he could remove the finger off the remote and stop the electroshock. The pillars keeping the box steady crumbled beneath them and tipped the entire box towards the arena and ghost shield.

Dani fell forward towards the broken window and grabbed the unconscious halfa as the box capsized, fell forward and right down towards the arena.

They hit the arena shield with a sharp blow and sent a shower of sparks over the spectator rows, where those nearest had fled to avoid being crushed by the falling VIP box.

Runner was rescued in time by his two slaves who had grabbed the box’s door handle at the last second, while the others fell.

The unconscious Thyramis fell through the broken windows as the first, hit the shield that fried him and send him tumbled down along to the lower spectator rows.

Dani and Arianna, both of whom had been forced back to their human form by the electroshock and lyre’s tone fell right after him, but since the top of the arena's shield wasn’t human ensured, they fell straight through without impediment and down towards the sand.

Dani fell first, regained mental sense enough to go ghost in the air and grabbed her unconscious mother. They landed heavily, but safely in the sand and Dani caught a glimpse of the lyre out of the corner of her bloodshot eye.

It landed on one of the arena sandstone posts with a snap as the ghostly material meet ghostly stone. The sleek string instrument's strings went in all directions and the golden frame shattering into a million pieces.

In the middle of the arena, Danny and Vlad snapped out of their trance.

Chapter 38

Danny had once before tried to be screwed over by a ghost spell.

And already one time was more than enough, in his humble opinion.

There was something indescribably personally violating about waking up from a trance and know you had supported all your actions for just a second ago, even though you knew in this awakened moment that it went against everything you stood for.

All this and more ran through Danny's head as the spell shattered into a thousand pieces and turned his triumphant snarl into a frightened cry. He hurried to turn his flaring hand away from Vlad's face beneath him.

The deadly ecto-blast shot from his hand a few millimeters from Vlad's cheekbones and hit the ghost shield above them with a deafening crash, making both of then cover their heads and flinch.

Vlad stared back at him with big red eyes and both could do nothing but stare with the same horror of what had just happened to them.

“Daniel…” Vlad began in a worried tone and horror of the wounds and marks he remembered to have applied to him, but their little bubble of dread soon burst by Dani's cries.

“Oh my god – *Mom!*”

Danny and Vlad turned their heads in unison and found Dani sitting bent over the unconscious Arianna. The remains of the toppled VIP box leaned threatening above them on top of the sparkling ghost shield and laid them in its shadows.

The two male halfas hurried to staggered to their feet and moved as fast as their hobbled legs allowed them, kneeled down next to Dani.

“Is she dead?” Dani asked with tear streaming down her cheeks, while Vlad took his wife's pulse.

He pulled Dani comforting under his torn cloak with a soothing look

and shook his head.

"No, she's alive, she's already beginning to heal."

Danny looked down and saw he was right. The long bloody scrapes the sand that had worn her clothes and arms, was already beginning to patch itself up and Danny noticed how his own speed healing had set in and started on his own superficial scratches.

Vlad looked like something out of a warzone and Danny's eyes darted guilty to the large green wounds that had soaked Vlad's shoulder in ectoplasm and melted ice.

Danny reminded himself that Vlad was a halfa and would heal completely, which was good, otherwise Danny would have to explain Arianna why her husband couldn't walk straight.

Danny winced at the memory of the kick he had given Vlad and ran one finger over the claw marks that had torn his back and felt how they start stitching them together with an itchy feeling.

The bitemark on his neck had thankfully not been deep enough to tear any main veins, but the imprint of the two burning hands on his neck hurt like hell.

Danny opened his mouth to ask Vlad if he had a plan and found that he could only produce a hoarse croaking. Vlad's face was the essence of guilt. Danny waved him off.

"You two really fucked each other up," Dani commented observant as ever and Danny sent her an "I shit you not" glare in lack of speaking his mind with words.

An unintelligible groaning made them all aware that the fourth family member had woken up to deed and the groggy Arianna took their hands to get up and sit.

She tried to massage her temples to lift her headache a little, but bumped her hand against her helmet. She started scratching it furiously like an angry cat with a pissed groan.

"MmmmmFFMMMMMMMFFDFFFF!!!"

They all sighed in relief. She was alright.

They lifted their heads in alarm as all the arena gates opened at once with the ringing sirens. Ariana rushed to switch back to ghost along with Dani as the Cube guards began to pour in from all sides and the four halfas pushed back to back.

Lifted their flaring hands and moved to their unique fighting positions. Prepared to fight. -

The black unknown type of stone which delivered walls and floors to the cells as well as the rest of the cube, seemed to suck all life to it and Sam wondered if there was something to it.

She rubbed her hands over the smooth cool surface and shivered by the feeling. Even though she had leaned up against it for hours, it was just as cold as when she had first seated and her thighs and buttocks had become cold from sitting on the floor.

She grabbed her collar in annoyance, as it felt like it tightened again and she blew a strand of hair out of her face. Watched the little paltry assembly who shared the cell with her. They were the only people left in this part of the cube's prison.

All the other the ghost hunters had been sent out to the arena and Sam had along with the others, been able to observe the humans battle against Nightshade on the screen behind the guards.

It hadn't been a sight Sam wanted to witness again – it was only surpassed by the battle that had been started between Danny and Vlad.

The guards had flocked to get a spot by the screens and made it impossible for them to see from the cell, but Sam could lively imagine what was going on simply from the vibrating sound of the audience's enthusiastic screams and the guard's grinning comments.

Jazz had pressed her knees to her chest and put her arms around them to hide her weeping face, but no one could ignore the sound of her sobs as they echoed in the cell.

They were only drowned out by Maddie's muffled crying against

Jack’s chest.

Jack had recovered from his bruise with their primitive aid and held his wife with a blank gaze. Could only listen to Danny screams and Vlad's cries of agony in stunned silence.

Sam grimaced and tore at her collar once more. Felt completely useless and helpless.

It felt as if all she could do was wait for the outcome of the game, and even that would be intolerable. Sam wasn’t exactly found of Vlad, but even if Danny won, it would still go far beyond the limit of what was right.

And if Vlad won ...

Sam shook her head to get the bloody image to disappear and her frustration was only fueled further as the guards burst into laughter because of something on the screen.

Sam slammed her fist against the bars, with a snarl, “shut up, you filthy motherf – arrgggGGG!”

The guard drew his ecto stick back from the bars as Sam collapsed on the floor by the electric shock and returned to the others, who had ignored the whole spectacle and continued watching the fight on the screens.

Valerie pulled Sam away from the bars with a scowl.

"Hey, I know this suck, but that doesn’t mean you should start ask them for an extra beating."

"I can’t just sit here and do nothing!" Sam snapped in return and pushed Valerie's hands from her, "I'm fine, he just shocked me, Val. No big deal!"

Valerie sighed and leaned against the wall beside her, staring up at the black ceiling matched the floor and the wall behind them.

“I feel like this place is trying to suck me in or something.”

Sam nodded, felt the same way. The black stone type seemed to pull in all light, swallow all sounds and draw one's gaze to it like a black hole. Draw you into its glossy cold dark and devour you completely.

Both girls shivered and got chills. Sam turned her head toward Valerie, noticed her worried expression. Her hands were playing with a bracelet. It looked homemade.

“Nice bracelet.”

Valerie ran a finger across the braided material with a sigh, "Dani gave it to me when we ran away from the wedding. Some dude in New York taught her how to make them. I don’t know what it is made of, it could be old wires and plastic bags or..."

Tears began to form in Valerie's eyes and she turned head backwards stubbornly to force them back into the eye sockets. Sam moved closer to her. Tried to give her some comfort.

Valerie sounded husky, "do you think she ... that he ...?"

“She’s fine,” Sam interrupted with a confident voice that didn’t give room for doubt, "Dani is a tough cookie, she has probably bitten Runner’s hand of as we speak."

Valerie laughed, but quickly returned to her depressed state. She leaned her head down on Sam's shoulder and Sam put an arm around her. It felt good to share a little warmth with a friend, even if the world seems to have turned on a dime.

Everything had turned around. Too fast. Too sudden.

Too…

The prisoner’s attention suddenly turned to the bars as the guards started shouting and order each other around. Sam leaned up against the bars and tried to catch what the commotion was all about.

The guards were clearly going into preparedness and she could only guess it was because of something that happened on the screen, since they keep yelling up about the “halfas” and “breakout”. All around them lights began to flash and a siren began to wail.

Several guards came flying through the hallway outside the cell and Jazz grabbed the bars in confusion, trying to get a grip of what was going on.

None of the guards payed much attention to them and most of them seemed in a panic as they flew around, and either took orders or delivered them to others in a chaos of flying ghosts and loaded weapons.

Sam and Valerie were both startled when Sam's breast suddenly buzzed. Valerie was the first to recover from the shock and pulled Sam into the corner of the cell with a frantic whisper, "you still have your *phone!?*"

Sam reached into her un-zipped battle suit and pulled the phone out of her bra. She had totally forgotten she had her second phone on her. Ups…

"I always carry two," she began a little meekly, surprised she could have forgotten something so essential. Valerie could only stare at her in mild hysteria.

"You've had a mobile all the time? – why do you even have two!? "

"It’s a rich people thing," Sam snapped to get out of the embarrassing explanation, that was the truth.

She only owned two mobile to be able to talk Danny even after her mother had withdrawn her mobile before bedtime. In Sam's world, it was embarrassed that her mother was still capable of sending her off to her room without mobile or dinner.

Another reason she looked forward to college.

Sam opened the message with Valerie as cover and lifted an eyebrow. At first glance, it looked like an electronic receipt for store purchases, but as soon as the word "humane collar" jumped into her eyes, her interest skyrocket.

"Holy shit, it's an infrared lock to the collars," Sam whispered excitedly and Valerie's head snapped back to her in an instant.

“Who the fuck –?”

“It’s hidden number,” Sam interrupted confused and tried to get some sense of the message, "I don’t know who send it, but I know this –”

Valerie raised both eyebrows as Sam's collar snapped open and fell into her lap.

“ – it’s our ticket out.”

The guards had pretty much left the prisoner corridor, with the exception of two guards who shouted and pounded the buttons around the screens control panel, which gave Sam and Valerie surprisingly good cover to climb over and open the other’s collars.

Sam told Maddie and Jack two be quiet with a finger pressed to her lips and opened their collar with the mobiles infrared. Maddie rubbed her neck, happy to be without the heavy weight and helped her husband to his feet.

“But we still need the keys to the cell,” Maddie protested as Valerie, Jazz and Sam got up from the floor.

Sam scoffed with a grin and stuck her hand through the cell's back wall, much to Maddie and Jack's great consternation.

“Not really – in here we’re as good as ghosts without the collars. We just phase right though. Come on!”

The Fenton couple followed uncertainly and moved fascinated through the bars while they whispered in glee about the possibility of human permeability in an ectoplasmic space and theories of the law of human possession of wider ghost biology.

Jazz, Sam and Valerie let them babble and sneaked up on the two ghosts without a sound.

Neither of the two ghosts discovered that the humans had escaped their cell before it was too late and they grunted surprised as Valerie and Jazz hit them with their own weapons from behind.

The girls held on to the weapons and left the two unconscious guards

to hang over their control panel.

“Alright, what’s the plan?” Jazz asked grimly and Sam turned to one of the screens.

The camera that recorded the fight in the arena appeared to be on a rampant and filmed the four halfas fighting the inflowing bevy of guards who tried to get them driven apart.

Maddie stood beside Jazz and watch with wide eyes as Danny sent a third of the guards back with his ghostly wail. Pulled her goggles down over her eyes with the mouth tightened in a hard line and turned to the teens.

“We have to get out there,” she grumbled and Jack backed her up with a battle cry, which quickly became a whistling when his voice cracked in a fit of coughing.

”’am alright, just need my fudge back at the RV.”

The group laid the hallway of cell behind them and bolted for the door. They went straight through them like ghosts and entered the other side, that turned out to be the hub of the remaining cells on that floor.

The surviving ghost hunter jumped inside their cells and Dave Miscavits blinked surprised at the sight of them. Sam and the others looked around in confusion, where was all the guards?

“Get us out before they get back from the arena,” Dave began before they could ask questions and Sam ran to the first ghost hunter to remove his collar.

Maddie and Jack ran to the wall with the floating trolley, where all the hunter’s used weapon lay casually after the match and Jack grinned triumphantly when he found his Jack-oh-nine-tail.

Dave lifted on his hat as a thank after all the fifty surviving hunters had been freed, armed and instructed in the ghost zone's cheat code of free human movement.

“I must say, ol Dave here thought we were gonners for good. You

people wouldn’t have a fine transportation out of there to, would you?”

"The whole cube is surrounded by parking lots, ghost vehicles are easy to highjack," Sam said, pointing to the way they had come from, as she and the others started going in the other direction, "fly toward the southern coordinates and find a portal back! It’s easy!"

"Shouldn’t we help them or something?" Jack asked, but Maddie shook her head as they continued onward.

"Dave and the others can take care of themselves, Jack. Danny and the others comes first. We'll have to get them out of the arena."

They stopped when they had passed four walls and ended up in front of what looked like a control room. Jazz phased her head though for a quick look and found ten guards around a larger control panel.

One of their screens showed Vlad and Arianna who tried to destroy the great ghost shield that held them inside the arena and one of the guards turned on a button by the sight.

The guards nodded silently as the shield around the arena was reinforced and Jazz pulled head back out again.

"Okay there’s ten guards in there, but we can take them if we continue the stealthy method. I think I know how we turn the ghost shield above the arena off and can get to the others."

“Whatever you say. Jazzipans,” her father growled combative and excited for results.

The others nodded prepared and charged their weapons. Jazz smirked and activated her Fenton-peeler.

"Fire in the HOLE!" Dave shouted and ran past with his flock of yelling hunters.

The teens and the Fentons blinked a little stunned and ran in after them to deal with the fight breaking out between hunters and ghosts.

“Well, there went the stealth,” Valerie muttered and fired her

bazooka with clenched teeth.

Her shot hit down in the group of guards, who had formed shields to protect themselves and the control panels from attack, and were now blown in all directions.

Jazz jumped up with Dave and his two friends to take the left flank, while Sam and Valerie led the way to the right. Maddie and Jack watched with wide goggles and Jack whistled at the sight of teenagers fighting techniques.

“If we get home in one piece, I’m going to make a Sam and Valerie action figure, besides Jazz’s.”

His wife nodded and straightened her ecto-gun behind her to shoot the guard who had tried to escape through the door. A ecto-blast hit the wall behind them and Maddie pulled Jack down behind a toppled table.

She frowned by the sight of the teens jumping into fight without hesitation and loaded her gun with a grimace.

"I'm not sure I like the idea of even Jazz having kept this secret from us for so long. I don’t think our children trust us, Jack. I can’t stop blaming myself for what we have done to Danny all these years. Not to forget Vlad!”

Jack hummed, “well Vladdy seemed kinda angry with me….”

Maddie knew that "angry" was an understatement when it came to Vlad Masters contempt of her husband and patted Jack's cheek as he sunk into a hurt-puppy-face stage.

Dave jumped down to them along with Sam and they retained their shooting to recharge their weapons.

Dave filled the cartridge barrel of his gun with a breathless grunt, “sorry to go against your advice, but we couldn’t allow you to have all the fun. What is the greater plan other than kicking some ghosts, Fenton?”

Maddie fired toward the cluster of ghosts who had sought towards

the ceiling for cover and Sam pulled Dave and Jack down when four ghost rays hit the wall behind them.

“The plan is to get to the arena,” Sam gritted out between her teeth as she jumped up to return the fire and fell back down behind the toppled table, “there’s five huge VIP-boxes around the arena where the ghost masters are located. They run this place and they’re going down. The fastest way to get to them and stop the cube from functioning, is to get through the arena and to do that we need to get that ghost shield down. Else they’ll stay protected behind it.”

Dave hummed, a little impressed, “sounds like you people came her to kick some ass. I like that, you have me and my boys behind you, kid.”

Sam smirked and jumped to give the signal, “Jazz!”

Jazz got her que and jumped in between two ghosts and got behind their shield. Valerie was right behind her to cover her back and allowed her work room to figure out the instrument panel and function of the buttons.

Jazz gave it a quick overlook. Luckily for her it wasn’t the most advanced, since the ghost civilization seemed to be a couple of years behind human standard and she found the big button from before.

A power bar told her what way to turn to either enforce or lower the arena’s ghost shield and she turned it all the way down.

The screen fixed on the chaotic fight back at the arena flicked, as the shield around the sand arena glitches for a second, before finally collapsing and disappearing with a yellow snap.

The spectators who had remained in their seats to watch the unscheduled battle in the arena and felt secure with the struggle behind a shield, now screaming up in fear and panic.

The many ghost rays, shades and ecto-blasts which before had been contained behind the shield, burst free and brought absolute panic among the crowd, who struggled to get out of the way and get out of the great hall.

The last standing guards in the control room fled at the sight of the chaos on the screens and two of the guards escaped, while the hunters caught the others.

Dave and Maddie led them all out of the control room before they closed it off and shot the door access panel to pieces.

They all began to move in a flock to get at the arena and Dave yelled entranced by the hunt.

“You two really live up to the name as the world’s leading ghost hunters. When all this is over, we got to get a drink like in the old days – I can’t believe you and the teens would allow yourself to get caught just to bust this place from the inside. That’s an incredible suicide mission, I love it!”

“What?” Jack asked a little confused as he struggled to keep up with the lighter hunters, “get caught? We’re just here because of –”

“The duty!” Maddie hurried to interrupt and gave her husband a look that told him to keep quiet, “it’s our duty as ghost hunter to free the word of this ghost nest and stop them from taken anymore humans to the zone.”

“Duty, hunt, whatever,” Dave grinned and picked up speed.

Maddie moved closer to her husband with a hush voice now that the other hunter was out of hearing reach.

“Danny’s secret is our secret now, Jack. That goes for Dani, Vlad and Arianna to. As soon as we get them, we’ll have to get them away from Dave and his men. We can’t have them hurting them!”

“Right,” Jack mumbled, seeing a lot of things in a new perspective. Running beside him, Maddie’s mind was just as troubled. Running past actions and prejudices about ghost in their heads repeatedly.

What parents and friends they were… -

Danny dodged the incoming ghost-blast and fired a blast twice the size.

He returned to his position next to Vlad and brought up a shield to protect the man's left as he fired to the right.

Dani took a blast for Danny in return and continued to guard his blind side, while Ariana produced a couple of more shades to go out and fight in between the ring of ghosts around them. Above them the entire ghost shield began to flash and blink.

Most of halfas and guards were too preoccupied with the fight to notice the phenomenon, but Danny and a couple of guards began to stare up in confusion, as the shield suddenly blinked in a series of frantic flashes before it disintegrated and suddenly opened in a with a burst of air pressure.

Some of the guards was knocked down and Vlad landed hard against the sand near Danny, who had been brought to his knees by the pressure.

The noise of the arena's crowd rose tenfold now that there wasn't a shield to mute them and their panicked screams burst Danny's eardrums, as all the flying ghost-rays and ricocheted ghost-blasts flew out among spectator rows, creating explosions and wild panic.

Those who could fly shot towards the exits, while the earthbound spectators climbed over each other to get away.

"Oh, *Twinkies!*" Vlad groaned and returned to his feet with Danny's help.

Dani joined them quickly, while Arianna threw a strong shield up around them to protect them from the guards' returned attention.

She mumbled something behind the helmet, but nobody grasped much of it and she pointed to the entrance to the hall as they all stared at her in confusion. Danny turned his head and facepalmed by the sight.

The fleeing spectators had formed a plug by the arena's only entrance and would probably continue to do so for some time.

The doors had been closed with heavy gates and more guards, and although it wouldn't be a problem for them to walk right through it

with their human half, they couldn't escape without his friends and family – wherever they were.

Not to mention the problem taking form of the rapidly growing army of cube guards, who fired everything they had to break Nightshade and Dani's shield into pieces.

Danny was startled as Vlad grabbed him with a stern voice, "take them and get them out of here, Daniel. I get the others and –"

Arianna hit him on top of the head with a fist and made angry gestures with a muffled scolding. Vlad soothed his head in annoyance.

"It's in the marriage contract, woman! I'm the one who gets to stay behind and get to sacrifice myself, for fudge sake!"

None of them would have to argue anymore about who would get to play the martyr or have the last saying in the marriage, as the war cry of fifty armed ghost-hunters stormed through the walls of the spectator seats and started firing at everything getting in their way.

Danny spotted the beloved and missed signature orange and blue color of his parent's hazmat-suits and waved to them like there was no tomorrow.

They activated their jetpacks and flew to them along with the rest of Team phantom, all of them armed to the teeth and smiling by the sight of the halfas.

The Fenton's threw a couple of bombs down into the arena and spread the guards encircling the halfas, making the guards fled the deadly ghost gas.

Nightshade and Dani's shield kept the gas from reaching the halfas and Danny phased his family and friends inside the shield as the descended into the arena.

"You have no idea how happy I'm to see you guys!" Danny laughed and hugged them all after turn.

Jazz grabbed him, happy to see he was still in one piece after the

fight and Sam kissed him, even more relived that her boyfriend was still standing.

Valeri toppled Dani with a shower of kisses, while Vlad was crushed by one of Jack's bearhugs and if he hadn't been halfa – wounded or not – it would probably had broken the last of the intact bones he had left.

Sam opened both Vlad and Danny's collars and Maddie was already using all her spare tool to try get the helmet of Arianna's head, when the ghost-gas outside the shield was sluiced away and guards sent a shot from a cannon against the shield.

A huge crack spread across the black and green surface and Danny and the others placed themselves in combat positions, ready for when the shield broke.

Nightshade took them all by surprise by making the shield explode in hundreds of sharp shards and they got the upper hand, as they leaped from the ruined shield and started firing around the startled and wounded guards.

The ghost hunters back at the spectator rows had made a significant job thinning out the numbers of cube guards, but had lost some of their own as well, as they were down to thirty men.

One of the VIP-boxes was in flames, while another had been shielded heavily. By the looks of it, all the sponsors and leaders of the Cube was assembled in it and apparently planning their further moves from there.

The arenas mic suddenly began to scratch and the many ghostly faces pressed against the glass to see the show, while the commentator tried to get through.

Danny turned around after delivering a series of ecto-discs, as the many prisoner gates to the arena suddenly opened at once and armed ghosts started to walk into the light.

The abandoned microphone off the arena finally got the sound back with a static sound and Runner's voice boomed into the arena.

“Whoever kills that Yankee to Plasmius and Phantom, and captures my two halfa dolls alive, gets their freedom! Now get ‘em!”

The gladiator ghosts of various sizes and types who had moved into the arena, stopped to join the cube guards and took their orders. They all made a hand gesture to the VIP box, before preparing their weapons and went into battle positions.

Even behind the helmet, Danny could hear Nightshade squeaking in recognition and Danny suspected that she knew one or two of these fighters.

She dragged Danny and Dani back as one of the ghosts send a ball of fire in their direction and the Fenton couple hurried to duck.

Vlad jumped forward and caught the ball with his bare blue hands, before sending it back like a discus, now crackling with a net of electricity around it. The ghost had apparently not see that coming and was hit square in the face.

The halfas and humans parted into two groups as the assembled forces of guards and gladiators took a new position around them, and was forced into defend more than fight.

Jack and Maddie were skilled fighters, but without further ammunition and their backup arsenal of weapons at hand, they would soon be forced to rely on the halfas and Valerie.

The huntress equipment was self-powered, but she could only defend that much space at a time. Dani was doing her best, but lacked experience and stamina, while Nightshade and Danny was better skilled in fight with unfair odds.

Vlad had the most experience and power of them all, but in his weakened state, he would soon go down with the flag if he didn’t get a break to recharge his powers or got his large number of missing duplicates back.

Sam was doing her best as she defended Danny’s openings, but despite the effort, the gladiator ghosts was more skilled and more unpredictable than the cube guards, and not even Nightshade, who

knew a few or two, could handle all these opponents at once.

Danny formed one great dome-like shield above them all as he got the chance of a second and shrank it to forced them all into its safe center and become one group again.

As the halfas and humans was safe once more side by side, he moved the shield with a punch upward and the shield expanded. The many ghosts yelled and shouted in pain and surprise at they were pushed away and send crashing in all directions.

Danny panted from the effort and if it hadn't been for Sam and Valerie, who grabbed him securely, he would have buckled to his knees.

Sam and the others frowned in worry as the last human hunter up at the ranks was captured and surrounded just as them.

One of the gladiators moved forward to seize Dani and Nightshade to get his reward, but before any of them could defend the two female halfas, another gladiator had punched him with a growl. Not giving up Runner's reward to a lower ranked fighter.

The remaining gladiators suddenly eyed each other with suspicions, none of them ready to step down when the prize was freedom or willing to share when there could only be one.

One of the gladiators suddenly moved a foot and that was all it took before they jumped each other.

The confusion made the ghosts guarding the hunters leave the ranks to get control of the gladiators and Dave waved his hat at Danny and the others before he and his flock took the chance and ran through a wall to escape.

"My heroes," Maddie simmered sarcastic and Jack frowned in irritation.

"He always does that!"

Dave and his hunters betrayal was soon forgotten as the guards got control of their own traitors and moved in on the little group in the

middle.

“Lay down your weapon and turn human!” one of the guards commanded with raised staff. Of course, none of them felt like obeying and Danny was pretty sure no one here was gonna surrender just like that.

“As if, tin-soldier!” Danny sneered and Maddie turned her head to him in mild surprise.

It still shocked her just how confident Danny suddenly had become. But then again, Phantom had always been like this, she just had to remind herself that the ghost was her own son. That would take some time to get around.

“Yeah!” Jack joined with a wild grin, “you tell them, son! No one tell the Fenton family what to do!”

“Or the Phantom team,” Jazz growled and scowled along with Valerie and Sam.

“Same goes for the Masters,” Dani grinned challenging and raised a hand to get a high-five from her parents.

Nightshade gave her one on the second, while Vlad had to roll his eyes before succumbing to such a low show of team spirit. High-fives really wasn’t his thing, but he be damned if he let his own daughter hanging.

The group’s combined will to fight made the guards wary and the talkative one search his memory for the right procedure and what order he was to give next.

These humans and halfas clearly wasn’t going to surrender or give up to them, despite them being outnumbered and visible hurt. A strange behavior since most of the slaves and ghost the guards had come by valued their lives and afterlives more than anything else.

Really, the fled group of humans back at the row made more sense to them.

Before the guard leader could make a decision or the group could

crack a plan, Nightshade suddenly shouted from inside the helmet and shook in cramps. She fell to her knees and tried to get her helmet of as she writhed and screamed.

Small blue bands of electricity ran over her body and the smell of burned flesh filled their midst

“No!” Vlad shouted in alarm and tried to help her the best that he could, which turned out to be not much.

A crackling Runner walked through the ring of guards with confident – although limping – strides of triumph. He lifted a thick finger from the remote-control in his hand and Nightshade collapsed now that the electricity had stopped.

She gasped and lifted the helmet to match Runner’s eyes. They didn’t need to see beyond the helmet to know she was glaring at the ghost with pure loathing.

But that didn’t stop Runner from grinning nefariousness in return.

“Now,” he began with a threatening thumb hovering just above the remote’s button, “I think the show is over. Ya’ll humans have cost me a big deal, but this isn’t ma first rodeo and as the businessman I pride ma ’self to be, I can take it. Now, hand over the two dolls, if you’ll be so kind. I know ya’ll thinking I won’t press this button again and risk my little black beauty here loosin’ that little bastard in her womb, but trust me, folks. I will. I only need those two, so hand ’em over.”

“Over my half-dead body!” Danny and Vlad snarled in unison and Runner scoffed in annoyance.

“I’ll take ‘em from the ya’ll cold dead grabs if I have to ma ‘self!”

Nightshade wailed in pain as the button was pressed a second time and curled in on herself with airless screams.

Danny was certain she would miscarriage the child right there, but when the electroshock stopped she was still in one piece, despite her smoking cloths and ragged breathing. Vlad looked as if he was on the brink of ripping Runner’s head of and surrender at the same time.

It was strange to watch such desperate emotions flow across Vlad's face and Danny felt how the fight's bravado sieved out of him slowly. If they didn't surrender Nightshade would suffer till they did and possible die.

Danny's eyes darted around to find a way out, but the reality of the situation was pretty much etched in stone.

There was no way out.

He looked down as Sam grabbed his hand. She seemed to have come to the same sad conclusion as himself and her purple eyes found his.

"I'm sorry," she whispered, trying to tell him how disappointed she was in herself.

Normally she and Tucker would be the ones to end Danny's fight with a genius backup, that would turn all odds and save the day, but it seemed the normal efficiency of that strategy had turned its back on them today.

"Thanks for the text message though, it was genius for all it's worth."

Danny had been ready to tell her it was all his fault and if anyone was to blame it was him, but all he could do was blinking in confusion and look at her puzzled.

"What text message?"

Sam crocked an eyebrow, "the one that opened our collars, the one you send around."

Danny had no idea what she was talking about, he had downright forgotten all about the situation around them and the group that had listened in around them was just as confused.

Valerie stared at them, "but…if you didn't send us the message, then who?"

A gunshot rang through the sudden silence like a loaded cannon in a school library. Runner couldn't even scream out of pure shock as his hand and remote disappeared in pieces and splattered the nearest

guard's white amore.

One of them made a face of disgust and wiped some of the ecto-mush of his chin before turning to the ecto-shots direction with raised guns.

Finding a ghost standing tall on the top of the empty spectator rows with a smoking gun.

Temple, the brute ghost and chef of the Masters castle, blew the smoke of the tip of his gun with a look of absolute determination and the little maid beside him on top of the rows, flutter her eyelashes at him and look like she was going to swoon from admiration.

"Oh, Temple," she giggled like she was an actually young girl, and not just a granny in a young maid's form and smacked his rear with a giggle. Temple blinked with a blush.

"Fire!" the leader of the guards shouted and Temple grabbed Daisy to jump for cover.

A loud roar filled the cube and made the sand vibrate, as a huge chunk of the big black box southern side was torn open, like a can of sardines.

Two fire-blasting dragons pressed though the hole and the army of ghosts that had been riding the beats or followed tail, blasted though and started to fire away with loud war-cries.

Danny recognized every singles ghost, not just allies like the dragon princess, Pointdexter, Pandora, Cujo and Wulf – but also enemies like Walker, Bullet, Spectra, Box Ghost, Bertrand, Ember, Desiree and Technus.

Fright knight and Skulker landed before Vlad to defend him, just as Kitty and Johnny13 landed besides Danny and started to fire at all will. Danny was dumbstruck by the sudden army that had formed around them and come to save them from certain slavery and death.

He even though he saw Vortex in the crowd for a second. Danny passed the laughing Youngblood on his skeleton-dinosaur, as he rushed to be by Sam and the great black dragon' side.

The dragon shrank and morphed back into Tucker, who grabbed them both for a tight hug.

“Man I missed you guys!” he grinned and pushed his dragon medallion back under his shirt, “did you get my text message?”

Sam was just at baffled as Danny, but faster to get her shit together, “yeah, but how – what happened!? We though we lost you when you fell through Danny’s portal!”

Tucker cringed by the memory, “I did, not cool by the way, dude. It was like when you fall in a dream and wake up in your bed, just without the bed. Luckily, I must have landed on a turf of ghost land or something, ‘cause I woke up on a piece of grass drifting near Dora’s place. It was pretty crazy, oh and then I woke up with my PDA and this note telling me to text you guys the stuff on the paper, and opened this when I found Vlad – speaking of which…”

Tucker raised the thermos in his hand and pointed it to Vlad, who was standing with his back to them in the third ring of the fight. A blast of pink poured from the thermos’s opening and hit the halfa like a canon.

The teens rose their eyebrows as hundred, if not thousands of duplicates left the thermos and shot back into Vlad’s body to become one with the man.

Danny hadn’t seen this many duplicates since Vlad’s election day and could only watch as all Vlad’s wounds healed in seconds and the ecto-energy around his hands return to its former glory.

Vlad, shocked, but soon recovering with the sensation of unlimited power, laughter like the supervillain he was and started blasted a group of guards to dust.

The teens decided to move a little away from the power tripping lunatic and find some cover.

“That doesn’t make any sense,” Sam pressed as they hid behind the fallen VIP box, firing from a safe distance to the main fight in the middle of the arena, “who gave you the thermos and the note? And

how did you even convince the entire Ghost Zone to come fight for us?"

Tucker swelled with pride, "pretty easy, actually. I got down to Dora and told her what happened. She assembled her personal army and we started spreading the word to the rest of Danny's allies. When we got to Skulker and Fright Night, they were already getting ready to go and had called the rest of the ghosts to fight. Everyone just pretty much came her because they wanted to. Pretty weird."

"What?" Danny squeaked, not getting a thing, "since when have these ghosts wanted to fight for our case?"

"Since the wedding," Skulker grinned and jumped down to share their cover and fired his handgun at a group of guards, who had taken cover behind a fallen cluster of row seats.

He handed Danny an old balled piece of paper and Danny unfolded it. Sam and Tucker read over his should and Danny ran his eyes down the invitation.

It was the invitation to Vlad and Arianna's wedding, recognizable since Danny and the others had received one identical back then, but what made their eyebrow rose and Danny scowl, was the fact that Sulker's invitation had an extra part on the backside.

One Danny figured all but the humans geusts had received.

"It says here that all ghost attending the wedding and willing to make an oath to the Masters, will get a part of the world and get to rule it, when Vlad and Arianna become rightful rulers of earth," Sam stated with a sour look and Skulker grinned with dark glee.

"This will secure Skulker his right to hunt whenever he wants in the world!"

Vlad and Arianna had moved closer to them and Danny turned to them a snap, "what the hell! You can't promise something like that!"

Vlad just grinned in response and high-fives his crackling wife, before jumping back into the fight.

“We take this later,” Danny seethed with narrow eyes and followed Tucker and Sam as they jumped into fight.

Most of the guards had moved from attack to defense strategy and fought a hard fight to stay in formation. A third part for the army soon ran as they realized they would get cornered in the tight arena and moved to defend the openings to the cube instead.

Tucker transformed back into a dragon much to Maddie and Jack’s horror and threw them onto his back with swipe of his tail. Jack soon got over the shock, as he realized he was going to fly into battle on a fire-breathing ghost dragon and shouted in glee.

Maddie was mostly mute, but kept firing at the enemy along with her husband.

Danny followed the stream of his ghost comrades and was joined by the jetpack flying Sam and Jazz, along with Dani and Valerie on her board.

Vlad and Arianna lead their own division to the hole in the southern side of the cube along with their own allies and Vlad’s household.

They had turned out to be a lot more than just servants and Danny praised himself lucky that he had been fortunate enough to sneak into Vlad’s castle with only Temple and Daisy on the premises.

The fight soon spread to the rest of the parking lots outside the cube and as Danny watched, it became clear that rest of the city was being evacuated down the blocks.

Mercenaries, private forces, gangs lead under crime bosses and volunteers joined the guards, while a couple of slaves suddenly turned on their masters and ran or flew to their ranks to fight for their freedom.

Danny was turning a building into dust with his ghostly wail, as he suddenly spotted a white suit and cowboy hat. The teen left the fight to follow suit and speeded up, as the ghost ran for his life through the many small patches and backstreets.

Behind Danny, the last, but not most unwelcomed addiction to the

freedom fighters joined their ranks.

Ghost writer, heaved for breath and sweat a couple of buckets, flew to the open air above the fight and panted as he struggled to fly with his keyboard to the battlefield.

He came to a halt and sat down in his hovering keyboard with a relived sign, before sitting up straight with a excited grin and cracking his joints with a sharp grin.

“Let’s paint this town green, shall we?”

Danny ignored the doubled sounds of screams and destruction as he followed his prey down the empty streets. A trail of green ectoplasm lead the way and Danny flew down a series of alleys before he found what he had been looking for.

Runner's luck came to an end as he ran into a literally dead end and he patted the green stonewalls in panic, as if to find a hidden switch or stone to secure him further path.

Danny landed and felt his hands flare with green ecto-energy, covering Runner in his shadow.

Runner turned around with sweat and fear oozing from his pours. Putting up a hand as to keep Danny from getting any closer. It turned out to be a pretty pathetic sight, since the ghost only had one hand now.

Danny’s nostrils were filled with the strong smell of ectoplasm that dripped from the makeshift bandage the ghost had wrapped around the stump and took another step forward.

“Don’t, don’t come any closer, ya awful little halfa scum, I’m warnin’ ya!”

Danny ignored him and walked closer. Runner widened his little eyes by the sight of the half-ghost’s cold expression and switched tactic like a flipping dime.

“Wait! Ma-maybe we could strike a deal, boy. Good ol’ Runner’s always up for a deal, just tell me what ya want and I’ll get it for ya.

Gold? Boys like gold, right? What about beautiful women? I could get ya some pretty exotic –"

Danny's fist hit him square in the jaw and made Runner fall to the side, and slide down the rough cobber wall. He started to scoot backwards and into the corner, with shaking breath.

"That was for my family," Danny explained in a cold emotionless voice.

Runner grunted as a kick send him hard against the wall. He coughed in pain.

"That was for my friends."

Danny seized the ghost by his shirt and lifted him to stand and raised a flaring fist.

"And this is for touching my girlfriend."

Teeth chattered against the pavement along with Runner's ectoplasm and Danny allowed the heaving ghost to land on the ground, as the sound of light feet reached him. He turned to find the twins standing at the opening of the ally.

The young asian couple had kept their matching outfits stark white despite the fight and their inconsequential expressions left nothing to read. They had both been equipped with long white katanas and Danny made ready for a fight.

Runner grinned with the five teeth he had left, "that's right, kids, kill him! Kill him!"

The two slaves zoomed in on Danny and he raised a glowing hand in warning, "I don't wanna fight you two. He's not worth it by the way."

"I will let the book decide that, ghost-boy."

Walked turned the corner and placed himself between the two humans. With a press of a remote the slave collars around their pale necks deactivated and the metal fell to the ground.

Walker crushed the remote under his boot and the two humans packed their swords away. He nodded firmly to them.

“As promised for your cooperation in this crime-case, you will receive your reward from my left hand, Bullet back at the town square. I will take it from here.”

The two humans simply nodded and then smiled as they linked arm in arm and walked away, leaving the place without hesitation. Walker remained in place and opened his book in a grave manner of business.

A couple of Walker’s minions came to stand by him and drew their sticks simultaneously. Danny was still confused by the sudden turn of event and moved his foot in disgust as Runner crawled past him and grabbed Walker’s leg with a hopeful smile.

“Walker! Ma good friend and fellow Texan! Put that blasted halfa in chains! Please save me!”

Walker flipped a page without taken much notice of the pleading ghost and tapped the page with a gloved finger of authority. Runner protested in panic as two of Walker’s minions placed a pair of glowing handcuffs around his wrist and dragged him to his feet.

Walker ignored the babbling ghost with a firm recitation from his book, “by the new rules of the Ghost Zone and my edited version – due to an incident last Christmas truce that needed some research whenever half-ghost goes by same rules as ghost or not – you; Dick Runner Junior the 3th, are arrested for commitment of a series of crimes that now will be listed. Illegal slavery and murder of humans and ghost alike. Enslavement of a rare and endangered ghost species better known as the “halfa” and in same encounter sexually harassed a minor halfa, making attempt to kill an pregnant halfa – and as a part of your business, enforced murder, torture, kidnaping and trafficking of Texans. As the new mayor of this city and soon to be lord of North America under the authority of our regent Halfa king in the near future, I find you guilty of these crimes and will lead you to your imprisonment and further trial, that will lead to a possible execution by the end of this month. Everything you say will be ignored and possible cause me to cut out your tongue. You will not

be allowed to make a call for a lawyer and any request for a trial that doesn't include me and my own jury as judge, will be denied and punished with a beating. Now get along."

He closed his book with a firm snap and Danny tilted his head to read the cover, as the ghost and his minions moved the screaming Runner to his doom.

RULES – renewed edition.

"This is so weird…" Danny whispered and tailed Walker back to the open streets.

The Soul Center seemed to have been turned on end and all around him, ghost was lead to imprisonments, while slaves in all sizes and species was freed of their collars and found various ways to celebrate their new freedom.

Danny felt like a daze as he watched the world around him and just nodded as ghost and humans patted his back and shoulder with wide grins.

Portals started to open around him for slaves to run through and transportations in all different variations left the city to get to other places.

Walker's minions and voluntary police forces worked to get the fleeing slave masters, while trying to get some order on the street and Danny walked into the giant party that had started in the middle of the city.

A woman with a baby on her arm grabbed him to kiss his cheeks and thanked him over and over again for freeing them. Danny was to baffle to say much and listened as the freed slaves chanted the same word over and over again.

"Halfa! Halfa! Halfa! Halfa! Halfa!"

He felt how the pressure lifted a bit. He was still tense and ready for a fight, but slowly the many unthreatening smiles and touches of thanks made his nerves cool down. It dawned on him they had concurred a city.

They had freed a city even.

In a strange way, it all felt like one of those dreams that pass you by to quickly and leaves you dizzy. Danny ran a hand through his white hair and couldn't stop a smile from forming on his dirty face. They were alive. They had defeated the Cube.

They had won.

The many months of pinned up fear and worries seemed almost too heavy to let go, but slowly and surely, they left him and in the empty space they had reigned, a feeling of relief filled and made him calm.

His eyes darted to the many prison transports that was currently being filled up with the city's slave masters and the teen nodded slowly. In a way he was thankful that Walker had stopped him in that ally.

Danny realized that he had been ready to kill Runner and beaten him till there wasn't any more to beat into the pavement. It was a scary thought, but it sobered him in a way that almost made him cry.

When he had visited this city for the first time to free an unknown halfa, he had left it with stained hands and murder on his conscious. Now he would get to leave it with hands little cleaner and a freed city.

Maybe he could even get to forgive himself one day for killing those three fairies, with the memory of all these faces of hope around him.

Danny followed the feeling of Vlad's ghost-signature and found the halfa besides Skulker and Temple on the side of a toppled building that once have been a restaurant. They were currently sharing a bottle and celebrating their victory, when Skulker turned to him.

"Come join the celebration, Whelp. The city is ours!"

Danny offered a wry smile and levitated to them. Behind them, his family and friends was settled around a bonfire and eating different delicacies from the restaurant, served from silver plates by Daisy and the other servants.

Sam crawled up from a window with a bag of olives and a bundle of baguettes, when she caught sight of him. She handed the food to Jack, who was telling a resent war story to the others and meet Danny with a kiss.

Danny pulled her closer and ignored Skulker's catcalls.

"Isn't it amazing?" she asked breathless as their lips parted, "all the slaves have been set free! All the humans are going back to earth and their homes – I can't believe we did it!"

Danny shared her grin, but suddenly frowned when he didn't spot a member of the group, "wait, where's Arianna?"

Vlad handed the bottle of expensive ghost wine to Skulker and send Danny a look the teen didn't knew how to decipher.

"She's at the Cube." -

The sound of a megaphone was the first sound that reached him as she walked down the corridor to the spectator rows of the arena.

Without spectators and the sound of visitors, the giant cube shaped building seemed almost hollow and his slow vary steps had created an echo down the abandoned halls. Danny thought back to the time he had visited the Cube for the first time.

The place had seemed gigantic, invincible and almost alive with its life-sucking walls and dark atmosphere.

Now that its masters had fallen and its seats hall laid empty it was almost unrecognizable in destruction.

Danny could have flown to the arena – the only place of light and sound still – but there was something in his guts telling him to get the hell outta here and wait for Arianna to come out herself.

Danny frowned as he moved past fallen crumbles of the black walls and moved to the lighted square that was the entrance to the arena in the center of the Cube.

The sharp sound of the megaphone sounded near and he recognized

Arianna's distorted voice as she giggled into the devise.

Danny took a last step into the artificial light and searched for her with his eyes. The arena had been left as an utter mess after the fight and a couple of the giant lamps had been destroyed or was currently hanging from the ceiling like hanged men.

Most of the rows had been crushed from the fleeing spectators and specks of different colors tainted the floor under his boots. Only the fantasy set borders for what or whom they had come from.

Danny lifted a bow as he found that a battle was currently at stake down at the arena. Ten ghosts, some dead some alive, occupied the sand and fought with blunt weapons, and powers down the arena. And by the looks of it – they had been for some time.

He watched in stunned silence as hundreds of ghosts in different armor hooted or yelled sadistic encouragements from the scattered seats around the arena. He realized it was the former ghost gladiators.

"Give him the gut-wreaker! Yeah, you know the one! Use the spear, you moron!" Arianna yelled into the megaphone and sighed in content, as she pressed herself deeper into the many silk pillows and cushions, that had been stacked in a luxurious pile on top of a number of the seats near the area's edge.

Danny set of to get to her and passed the large dark shield, that keep the fighting ghosts from leaving the now much smaller arena.

She looked up from the fight with a sweet smile and extended a hand to him, "Danny! Come to watch the show? – Sit with me."

She kicked her old helmet to the floor and patted a spot next to her. Danny looked down into the arena.

An old ghost in a toga grunted and spat ectoplasm from his quivering lips, as a ghost in a huge renaissance dress pierced him with a spear. It dawned on Danny that he had seen these ghosts before.

"They're the Cube leaders and sponsors…" he observed and she nodded, very pleased with herself.

“One last show before they stop the games forever, come watch it with me. I’m cheering for the slave warden, but don’t tell him I said that. His ego is to damn big for a ghost his size.”

Danny wrenched his eyes from the slaughter and turned to her with a scowl, “call it off.”

She acted as if she considered it, before leaning back into the pillow with crossed legs.

“Nah. It’s my party I can do what I want.”

“It’s sick,” he spat and pointed to the watching gladiators, “you and everyone else was forced to fight to the death by these ghosts and now you’re acting as them? What is wrong with you? Walker is imprisoning slave masters outside and you down right execute them?”

She giggled, “of course I am, what did you expect? To let them live?”

“Well – yeah!”

She scuffed jeering, “aww come on, kid. I know you’re a superhero and all that, but could you step out of the comics for a second and move back to the real world? Villains might get locked away when superman catch them and let them live no matter what they’ve done, but in the real world? My world?”

She leaned forward to get face to face with him and smiled widely.

“I’m my world you wait ten long dreadful years of humiliation, beating and hopelessness and take the chance of revenge with a smile and celebration. I have waited a decade for this and so have they.”

She gestured to the row, where the former gladiators cheered and yelled mocking comments to the fighting masters. Danny felt a lump form in his throat and Arianna hummed in satisfaction.

“Look at them Danny, look at my new army – isn’t it sick? They could have run if they wanted to, but all you see here apparently wants to join us for some reason! It’s so fucked up, I mean I ran when I got the chance, but these maniacs just stayed after Vlad freed them. They’re

even more psychotic than I am! That one over there got the idea of this game!"

She laughed and Danny could only stare at her.

"Is this a joke to you!?"

"Life is a joke, Danny – and I'm the pun-master of this evening," she cracked and raised the megaphone, *"hey what's funnier than a fight between two slave masters? Two dead slave masters!"*

The spectators grinned and started to throw popcorn after the fighters. Arianna lifted the megaphone again, only to have it snatched by Danny.

"Can't you see what you're doing?" he sneered to get some sense into her stubborn head, "you're just being part of a circle. An endless and bloody circle of killing that doesn't stop, because no one takes a step back and do the right thing. If you kill these ghosts instead of giving them a fair trial, what makes you better than them then? Nothing! What are you gonna do next? Get a slave?"

He couldn't for his live believe her. Of course, he could see what she was getting at with all her talk about revenge, but in the end Danny knew it wasn't worth it. Revenge was never the answer to anything.

Revenge just caused others to take revenge for them and so on until there wasn't anything left. He shook his head in anger.

"I can't believe it! If you willing to give these gladiators a second chance, when be the bigger person and hand those slave masters over to Walker. Do the right thing and let them be judge by the system. I know you're better than this."

"Hey, I'm already giving second chances here" she defended, "lots of them. Just look at these gladiators I've set free. Everyone here is probably more fucked up than me and would eat human infants just for sick kicks. I might be the most winning ghost of this arena, but everyone here has killed other ghosts without mercy or remorse. And now they have are all been given a second chance, Danny, even though the right thing probably would be to take them down like

mad dogs, before they kill again. Look at it like this – the bad guys are giving second chances of redemption, just like you gave me back then. Now what you're watching down in that arena is the even worse guys killing each other. Everyone gets to be happy other than the true villains. Isn't that what you meant?"

"You know what I meant," he scowled and protested as a shade snatched the megaphone from his hand and handed it back to Arianna.

She rose and ruffled his hair.

"Yeah I do and that's why I promised the winner the prize all ghost fighters receive in this place."

Danny smacked her hand away, "what? Freedom?"

"The honor of winning" she laughed and spoke into the megaphone, *"fighters and former slaves, I have the honor of inform you that the first slave to ever rebel against the Cube has joined us! Say hey to my boy and savoir, Danny Phantom!"*

Loud cheering spread through the groups of gladiators and they started chanting his name.

Arianna grinned and pressed the device to his face, "say something Danny. Don't let your fans down."

Danny pushed it away, angrier than ever, "stop it!"

She lifted the megaphone back to her lips, *"Danny has come to watch the winner receive his prize and I actually think we just found the one."*

A single ghost was left standing on the arena, ecto-stained and heaving heavily. Eyes burning as he looked up on the seated ghosts and his grinning executer.

"You know," Arianna began with a scornful voice of utter glee, "*I'm not surprised it would be you who took the prize, our very own Slave warden and prison guard!*"

Loud booing and angry yells filled the rows and Arianna nodded

severely. *“For the ones who doesn’t know, mister warden here is quite old in this business and as some of you may know, a former slave fighter in the arena. Yes, Mister warden here won the ultimate prize after 1000 years of service. His freedom.”*

Angry yells sounded all around Danny and the ghost down in the arena eyed them with a dark glare. That didn’t seem to get Arianna the least and she moved closer to the edge.

“And what did he do with his freedom?” she asked around and more angry yells made echo down the rows, where the gladiators had lifted from their seats and spoke their anger. “*He took up the hobby of training new slave fighters and serve his former masters!*”

The rows exploded in chaos and the ghosts started to move down to the edge of the shield to shout and threaten the warden. The slave warden ignored them, keep his eyes on Arianna, who seemed to love the chaos just as much as Danny loathed it.

“Then let’s all deliver him his prize and show him the honor the same way he taught us – you all know the phase!” she yelled and gestured to her fellow gladiators.

The former slaves grinned sardonic and one after one they made the old hand gesture to the slave warden and spook as one.

“You’re dead souls. You’re always be dead souls. You wake up, fight and go back to sleep. Repeat. You know who repeats and fight in here? ***The dead ones.”***

Danny turned around as she lifted the shield and gave over the warden. The sound of the ghosts ripping the screaming warden apart was almost too much for Danny and he forced himself not to throw up.

He turned his watery eyes back to Arianna’s back with tired eyes. He understood now.

He could safe her from this place, but couldn’t never truly save her.

He had always known that some people was evil, that some carried a darkness in them, but as the human and self-proclaimed hero he had

become, Danny had always believed that people could be saved.

Not just from dangers or evil forced, but form themselves as well.

He had always believed that second chances and justice was a constant that could cure even the darkest of situations and bring the light back to the world.

Danny knew that people could change and lives altered, but as he watched her shoulders bounce with genuine laughter over this ghost's violent end, Danny was forced to understand that he was wrong.

No matter what he did, how many chances and how much he altered, he couldn't save her from this. There was a darkness in them all… even him. A meaningless will for destruction and bloodthirst that he couldn't save them from.

Vlad's yearning for world domination and power.

Arianna's seeking for revenge and senseless killing.

Dani's unscrupulous hunt for approval of others, no matter the conserveness.

Even he had a monster in him. A dark Phantom

They only thing diverting him from the others, was his will to change it and live every day to withstand becoming one with his own evil self.

Just like him, there was an evil ghost in them all. A voice or presence that tempted with words or glory, hunger or power – a voice promising that these powers that made them different gave them the right to take things into their own hand without consequences.

A side of them that reasoned that self-interest was rightful and even fair.

And maybe…maybe it had been there already before they had placed one foot in the grave and become half-living, half-dead. Maybe Vlad had always wanted to rule, Arianna wished to hurt and Dani hoped to prove herself better.

Maybe even he held the unspoken desire to destroy those who had held him down.

It hurt, but he knew he would have to accept the truth. This wasn't something he could save them from, this wasn't something that would leave with care of love, second chances or the change of heart.

Arianna's laugh echoed in his mind and blended with Vlad's and then finally Danny worst memory. Dark Phantom. The darkness in him, the pain of his past, present and future.

Dark would always haunt him just like this. Dark had been brought into the world because of Danny's own relinquishment, his own wish to embrace the darkness. Dark had never been something to attack Danny from the outside.

He had lived within him. He had been created by the simple whish of help out of care. It wasn't Dark who had ripped Danny or Vlad apart in that destroyed future and created a monster. Danny had.

Danny left the arena the same way he had come. Left its darkness and bloodshed behind and welcomed the Ghost Zone's ever so calming world of green sphere. He would wait for her outside the cube.

Wait for her to outlive her darkness and return to him and the other, when she was ready. He couldn't do anymore for her.

He couldn't change her.

Just like she couldn't change him

Chapter 39

It had been a week since the conquest of the Soul center, the ghost city once known for its great slave harbor and existence as supernatural meeting of neutral ground.

With Walker as the new mayor of the city the place had quickly change, but for the better was a question of taste.

Vlad knew Daniel and his little friends probably would interfere if they knew Vlad had given Walker almost free reins, given him the ultimate power over the city and allowed him to rule it as a new headquarter for his mega prison.

The warden would have almost unlimited control over the southern Ghost Zone and that was all Vlad could have hoped for. With most of the Ghost Zone under Walker's control, it would easier for Vlad to gain control of the world with Walker under foot.

The warden may have despised him before, but the whole "halfa protection" and new set of rules, made Vlad and his kin almost untouchable. It was almost comical.

Who would have known that Arianna's outburst of not relating to the warden's ghost rules could have transpired such wild species protection from the ghost's side?

It was almost to perfect. Vlad shrugged and moved to the grand window of his private study. A garden party was currently unfolding down in the open rose garden, but something could indicate that it had moved into a barbecue party.

Jack had been impertinent enough to bring his own barbecue and was currently frying all kinds of meat and something that might look like a fudge glazed ham. Vlad rolled his eyes. Disgusting.

Maddie and Arianna were nearby, talking over a glass of lemonade by one of the small garden tables, while Daniel and his friends played football with a ghost dog Daniel had been witty enough to introduce as "Cujo".

The joke not lost on the man.

Vlad had never been much for dogs – the same applied for his cat Maddie – but Daniel had solemnly promised to keep an eye on it and as long as it didn't disturb the white persian resting on the garden wall or began digging in his wife's roses, he would allow it.

It seemed to Vlad that this would have been unthinkable on his part for just a year ago.

The same applied to the sight of his daughter and her ... well girlfriend, who was sunbathing on the grass. Vlad still didn't like the idea that his daughter was dating at such a young age, but if he were to be honest, he preferred Miss. Grey as his daughter in law rather than some spineless schoolboy.

The young woman was a responsible person and more than able to take care of his daughter and she knew what awaited her if she so much as grumbled a wrong hair on Dani's pretty head.

He turned his head as the door to his study opened after a slight knock and the little ghost maid stuck her head inside.

"Lord masters, sir. Your wife is askin' for yer ter join de garden party."

Vlad felt a second of anger. He had already made it clear to Arianna that he wasn't going to anticipate. Like she didn't know about his reasons. The mere fact that she had arrange this little party without his permission to bring him together with the Fenton again was an insult in itself.

Did she really believe that the shared fight in the Soul Center and their revelation as halfas to the two ghost hunters would change his hatred to the human and kill his grudge? Don't be naive.

"She already knows the answer to such question, thank you Daisy, you can be excused for now."

The little maid wasn't slow to catch the hidden acid in his voice and lingered in the door longer than necessary. She cleared her throat.

“If oi may spake me mind, sir.”

“You may not –”

“Oi are gonna chucker anyway, everythin' else wud be unseemly,” she interrupted with a stern voice that reminded Vlad of his old russian nanny.

The memory of the strict lady always made Vlad shudder and halt in his scolding for a second. Daisy seemed to have taken his sudden silence as a que to continue and her tone turned more caring, “Oi nu yer 'av sum bad blood between yer an' Mr. Fenton. Oi may not nu al' de details, but oi can tell dat yer friend is sorry.”

That caught Vlad’s attention. Daisy's words seemed completely absurd, Jack Fenton had never in Vlad's life or memory apologized as much as ones. He had never heard Jack utter such words and it was just one of those things he held against the man.

Even now that Jack been show his errors and become fully aware of the full damage he had inflicted back at the old accident, the man hadn’t as much as uttered that he was sorry. Jack Fenton appeared to be too foolish to see his own loads.

It irritated him to no end.

“Don’t be silly, Daisy, the man is the definition of stupidity when it comes to the destruction he causes his surroundings. Don’t come her pamper me with dishonesty, I won’t tolerate it.”

“Den yer want me ter send 'im away?”

Vlad turned around with a frown, “come again?”

“Mr. fenton is waitin' ter enter yeir study an' hav a word with yer, sir, shud oi send 'im away?”

Vlad eyed her for a long minute before scowling and waved dismissingly with his hand. He returned to the window and found that Jack Fenton was missing from the picture alright. He pursed his lips and made a decision.

“Send him in.”

He might as well hear what foolishness the man had at heart. Maybe it would even prove to be entertaining. The man was as always completely clueless when it came to Vlad’s spite during dialog.

Daisy bowed like the victorian maid she was and smiled, “as yer wish, sir.”

The heavy footsteps that was Jack’s signature stumped into his hearing and Vlad felt the oaf’s eyes in his neck as Jack entered his private study.

“Hey, V-ma…I mean Vlad.”

The effort to actually address Vlad by his right name and not one of those silly nicknames of his, actually made Vlad turn to look at the big man. Jack couldn’t have been more out of place than he was now.

The private study’s heavy classic furniture and style was such a stark contrast to the orange hazmat suit and unpolished behavior of Jack. The sling around his right arm and stiff limping didn’t help either.

Despite having fought in the same fight, Vlad’s appearance was perfect in comparison to Jack’s bruises and scratches. The big man looked around as had he never seen luxury before and if Vlad could pride himself of knowing just an ounce about the man, it might as well be.

“What?” Vlad asked in a cold tone, not admitting that the man’s use of his name had had any impact on him.

After his reveal as the Wisconsin ghost and halfa, Vlad didn’t feel the need to play nice with the man anymore. It was strangely satisfying to watch Jack squirm under his towering gaze and know that he didn’t have to act all good willed around him anymore.

All cards were on the table. Vlad held all the aces. What kind of hand was the man willing to play?

Jack meet his eyes and for a second Vlad actually though he found something in those small blue eyes that could be taken for regret. It

disappeared as soon as the man put up a goofy grin. How typical.

“Hey, if you’re busy I could come back later, just wanted to take the chance of talking face to face instead of the phone. Not every day I get to visit Wisconsin.”

The man grinned as if he was funny and Vlad’s frown deepened. Jack sobered up and scratched his neck in a manner that resembled his son. Vlad hadn’t seen the man this nervous since college. It was strangely fascinating.

“Well, if I had to decide, you and Maddie would have stayed in Amity,” Vlad snorted, “I only allowed you on my ground because of my wife. She seems to believe it would be best for Danny to have you over before he starts college. Before he gets settled her for good. With his *own* kind.”

Vlad’s eyes glowed red at the last and Jack frowned for a second, before returning to his old grin.

“Yeah, they grow up so fast, don’t they? Well that and change species, hadn’t seen that coming…”

“Many of us *hadn’t*,” Vlad growled and Jack seemed to realize his own mistake.

“Vlad, I…I came to,” Jack scratched his neck again and Vlad felt the need to stop it.

Getting reminded of the younger Jack only caused to distract Vlad and remind him of old times. Something he didn’t needed right now, that he was taking his long-waited anger out on the man.

“To what?” Vlad sneered, “Apologies? Are you really his thickheaded that you believe a single word of sorry could change anything? Change me? Don’t be that idiot we all know you to be, Jack. It’s getting old.”

Jack looked hurt and Vlad took it in with a sardonic smirk.

“You should probably praise yourself happy for your own clumsiness. If you hadn’t mismanaged the old college portal, Arianna would

never had gotten powers or come into my life. If that hadn't been the case, Maddie would have been my wife by now and your children mine. Even of you hadn't ruined me for life and doomed me to the life of half-dead, I would still have been the one to marrying Maddie and getting the happy ending you so foolishly destroyed for yourself when you cursed your only son to follow in my footsteps. How does that feel, Jack? To know that you're the course of your own child's distortion and suffering?"

Vlad waited for the rage, the anger. Anything that would give Vlad an excuse to hurt the man once and for all. And this time he would get to do it with his own face and name. There would be no Wisconsin ghost this time. Only the pure reality.

Vlad allowed the electricity to crackle in the hand behind his back and waited for the man to jump him or raise the first fist.

He was deeply confused when that didn't happen. Instead, Jack looked as if he was on the brink of tears. Vlad rose his eyebrows. He hadn't expected this.

"I know," Jack whimpered and had to breath a couple of times to compose himself, "I admit I might have been too hasty back when we tested the portal and that I could have taken more responsibly for disable you. I know I acted like a jerk, but the truth is, that I just wanted our invention to become a success. I wanted it to be our breakthrough. You and Maddie had doubted it for weeks and I only wanted it to prove that…if we stick together and worked as a team, we could prove that ghost was real and then maybe…you would stop take me for a fool."

Vlad stared. He was astonished to say the least. He had nothing to add as the man continued.

"I know that you had feeling for Maddie, but I never expected them to be more than just friendly. I guess I completely misunderstood the situation as I always do and just acted on impulses. You know I heartily think before anything, Vlad. You know I'm an idiot, everyone does. You're were right, I can't pick up a butter knife without being a danger to my own family. I still can't believe you and Maddie succumbed to my level back at college. Had I just been more like you

or Maddie, this would never had happen and…" he sank loudly and downcast his eyes, "my son would have been forced to go through all this either. Neither would Arianna, even though I believe you two belong together. You're like made for each other. But I still believe somewhere that something good came out of my mistakes. Danny's changed, but I believe it's a good change. He might be half-ghost, but he's still my son and I'm proud of him for using his powers as he does. Same goes for you, Vlad. If it hadn't been for you, we would have been dead by now. I can't thank you enough."

Vlad took a step back as Jack grabbed his hand, with pleading eyes. Vlad had never seen Jack like this before and it both repulsed and sadden him in way he wasn't ready for. Jack clutched his hand as if it had been the only thing still keeping him flooding and ranted on.

"And I am sorry. I'm sorry for what I did all those years back and I'm sorry for leaving you alone in that hospital. We both are. And I'm sorry for being so damn foolish and never considering what my actions might have caused you. I know words never will be enough, but if you wish me back in your life or find the greatness to forgive me…I will do anything to make it up to you."

Vlad had no words and Jack simply nodded as he received no answer and turned to leave. Vlad followed the man with his eyes, as Jack left the room. The silence was almost too much, but Vlad couldn't bring himself to break it.

He was stunned. Utter stunned.

Never in his life would he have predicted something as this. It was all wrong, twisted. Jack wasn't supposed to apologies; the man was an idiot. He wasn't capable of seeing the errors of his way. That was the Jack Vlad knew.

The one he loathed. The one he had kept as a despised picture in his mind for all these years.

But this?

He had no words.

Before his eyes, everything crumbled. The things he ad prided himself of knowing. The images he trusted to be truth. All the anticipations he had ever believed to be the cruel reality. He had always told himself that he knew who Jack Fenton was.

Now he wasn't so sure.

His eyes searched around is study in loos of better things to do. Tried to find a standpoint that would bring the chaos in his mind to stop. Just stop.

It occurred to him how clean his study was. Every furniture was matching, all decoration picked out with defined taste and care. Everything shining like it was brand new and expensive to the thread. It looked like perfection. Just like is own appearance. Perfect.

Or at least that was what he had thought for just a minute ago. Or was it more? How long had he been standing in here? He pinched the bridge of his nose, suddenly feeling a headache building up.

An urge to tore open the pillow on the couch next to him suddenly appeared. He stared at it for a second. It matched the couches and had been made in hand just like the rest of his furniture by experts in their field.

Utter elegance and careful handcraft. It was perfect on the surface… but what about the inside? What about any of the things within his reach? What were they beyond a perfect surface?

Vlad groaned by those mad thoughts. This was all Jack Fenton's fault. Why hadn't the man acted as expected? Where had this sudden awareness and humility suddenly come from? Why wasn't he predictable?

Vlad widened his eyes in sudden realization. Maybe he didn't knew Jack at all.

The thought scared him. It opened up for the possibility that when it went down to everything…Vlad didn't really know his fellow people at all.

He dumped down on the nearest couch and had to take a minute.

Had to get his mind back together. Vlad had deep down known that Danny was right when he in the past had called Vlad the bad guy. A villain. A bad person.

Good people didn't steal righteous dollar bills to double their own fortune or manipulated people to get their ways.

Vlad could think of the world as a cruel place where only the strongest survived and believe that the world owed him for making him a monster, but it would never change the fact that his action could be named as righteous to anyone else than himself.

He hadn't even cared for others until Arianna had declared her love to him and that was only months ago. No, he wasn't a good person. He never had been, despite the image Maddie and Jack might had regarded him as back in collage.

Vlad just hadn't been able to act on his own dark impulses back then before he got his powers. He expected the same as evident in Arianna's case.

The change from human to halfa had just opened up for deeper desires and sudden freedom, no normal human life would have unleashed.

For many years Vlad, had even taken pride in being driven by immorality. That his powers proved that he was an over-human whose actions and success was a sign of greatness, only he was destined to achieve.

That all his actions were righteous because of his own ability to succeed where others had failed before him. Anyone getting hurt or killed in the process of his rising to power was just simple sacrifices for the greater good.

His greater good. But despite all this, Vlad had never believed himself to be evil.

But here he was. Ready to kill the only person in the world that still believed him to be perfect and despite all evidence of otherwise… Jack still believed him to be good.

Sudden rage filled his mind and made his eyes turn red with hatred. How dared Jack take this from him? How dared he come here asking for his forgiveness, when Vlad had prepared to crush him for the lack of guilt?

Take this simple yearlong whish of revenge from him on the edge of success?

He rose with clenched teeth and walked with determined strides to get to the door. If he was fast, he could still get Jack before he got to the hall and left the building. None of the guest in the garden would hear a thing and Vlad would get the man to himself.

He grinned like a mad man by the thought of what he could do to Jack. There was so many possibilities and ways of torture at his disposal. He would teach the man what it meant to suffer and finally unleash his anger over the man.

Show him just what he had created with his own clumsy hands. Torture him till he begged for death and even then, he would keep him alive and make him realize his mistake. What a mistake he was.

That no simple apologies couldn't save him from Vlad Masters' wrath.

That it was too late. *Twenty years too late.*

Vlad would crush him till the man was no more and event hen… then…

Then what?

He stopped halfway down the corridor. Considered his own train of thoughts for a moment.

He tried imagining it for a second. He imagined a world without Jack Fenton and came to that strange conclusion that he actually couldn't. Exactly what results would Jack's death bring him? Well, as for starters, a very angry Maddie. If not revengeful Daniel.

That thought made Vlad sober.

Daniel would hate him. All the hard work to get the boy to his side,

respect him and watch him with trust and admiration. Gone. It would vanish in a second. Even if he succeeds in hiding Jack's death and corps from them, they would find out eventually.

Something told him that Arianna probably would assist him in hiding the body, but she wouldn't be pleased. She wouldn't exactly leave him, but something between them would never be the same. Maybe she would even use it against him, should she see it fit.

Blackmail material at its finest.

Vlad realized destroying Jack wouldn't make his life better. If anything, it would only make it worse. It occurred to him he hadn't thought about Jack back when he had planned to find Nightshade.

Not once after he had overcome his fake love for Maddie, had he thought about Jack or planned to kill him. It was as if the relinquishment of Maddie had taken his pinned-up hatred for Jack with it as well.

The anger he had felt just a second ago wasn't exactly gone, but it wasn't as strong as it should have been. Like it wasn't real.

But then…what now?

Vlad searched himself for the answer. Forced his brilliant mind to come with the perfect solution as it always did and give him a plan for further action.

His mind told him to back to his study to think. It wasn't really a solution, but it was better than anything and he obeyed in lack of better options. He sat down behind his desk and folded his hands in thought.

A sudden impulse made him opened the last drawer of the old antique desk and he pulled out the old cheap frame.

The old picture of he, Maddie, and Jack, had collected a lot of dust, and the piece of tape that held Jack's face pasted to the rest of the picture looked carelessly. Had he fixed the picture at some point?

He couldn't remember, maybe in an act of booze. He sometimes did

thing like that while drunk. No idea why.

The three smiling faces stared back at him with young glee and ignorance of the future. They had been so young, so full of will to prove themselves and show the world that their claimed were true.

He didn't even know why he still kept the old thing around. He had kept it back when he still held romantic feeling for Maddie, to have something of her, but now that he was married and had moved on, there was no reason to keep it other than for the sake of memory.

He considered using his powers and just turn the thing to ashes, but something kept him back.

Maybe it was the fact that despite all odds, this picture always seemed to survive, despite the many destructing's of his home and years since its creation. He didn't even need the picture, its content already etched into his mind, clear as day.

He couldn't even bring himself to do anything other than fixing it while drunk, what was to be learned from this? Why had it survived all this time?

The stupid thing actually made him infuriated. It felt like it was challenging him to do something about it. Taking the final step, whatever that was.

He ran is thumb across their faces. Their smiles, the way they seemed to be so close and carefree. Even the stupid mullet and trends of their shared youth made a little smile twitched in the corner of his lip.

How stupid they looked. Even Maddie and her wild puffy hair. Jack even wore a hazmat suit back then. What was the chance that it was the same one he wore today?

"Disgusting," he mumbled to himself, but found that he didn't actually meant it.

There wasn't any malice behind his voice, just tiredness. Maybe that was it. Tiredness.

He had grown tired of hating Jack.

Vlad leaned back in his chair and exhaled heavenly as if he could let go of his troubles by breath. He couldn't, but the change of seat actually helped a little.

He had grown tired of this hate. Without the love for Maddie to sustain it and Daniel by his side, there wasn't much to keep in fueled. Sad as it was. Even the blame of his powers wasn't as an attractive blame as it had once been.

Vlad liked his powers and now that Maddie wasn't a means he had lost because of them, he could hate what he had become.

Being a half-ghost had only proved to be in is advantage and they had given him a family far better suiting for him than the one he had once wanted to steal.

Then what was there to held against the man other than his clumsiness and missing tact, now that he had even proved to be sorry for his actions? Nothing. Just nothing.

How annoying.

His eyes return to the picture and he found himself smiling. Despite the many disagreements between him and Jack, they had been pretty good friends back then.

They had stayed together even though bullies called them fags and their band had failed miserable after just one night's show. They had been a puny pair of nerds, but best friends nevertheless.

The many old memories of good times and long nights of ghost hunting around Wisconsin made a smile break out on his face. He tapped a finger on the picture and felt how those old memoires didn't bring anger as they usual did.

Vlad turned in his chair to watch the scene from the window and followed the activities down in the garden. They looked happy. Just like the faces on the picture.

He caught the reflection of his own face in the glass of the frame and found that he and his frozen 21-year-old self still had the same smile. The genially one that hadn't come naturally enough these past years.

He suddenly remembered why he had even made that Jack hologram in the first place. The on that had stolen his former Maddie hologram after the destruction of his plans to make a clone of Daniel.

Why he had put so much work into shaping the hologram like the Jack before the accident.

Vlad's eyes moved to Jack's smile. Such a stark contrast to the face he had made as he had begged Vlad for his forgiveness just minutes ago. The image loitered for a second in Vlad's mind, a little voice, much like Plasmius' began to whisper in his ear.

Vlad pursed his lips in thought. The man had come to him. Him. Not the other way around. Vlad may be the villain, but it was Jack, who had come to him om his crying knees. Begged him and admitted his mistakes.

Didn't that just prove that Vlad had bested is nemesis once and for all?

Jack had been the one to fall, the one to act out of submissiveness. Humiliated himself right here in Vlad's office. Declared Vlad his superior. Handed Vlad the last word in this case.

Forgiving Jack would be weakness or a sign of defeat. Taking the man back would be what Vlad had fought for years.

Utter victory.

A diabolic smirk crept onto Vlad's face and he chuckled to himself. How fulfilling. He pulled out his phone and dialed the number of his secretary. She took it the first dial.

"*Evening, Mr. Masters.*"

"Patricia, I have an errand I need you to do for me and be done within the next hour."

"*What kind of errant, sir?*"

Vlad tapped Jack's face, still smiling like the cat that ate the canary. The man would have to prove himself to Vlad for the rest of his live.

And after this call, Jack would have to bow down to him, creep before him and never get the chance to rise again.

He would owe Vlad for the rest of his existence.

“I need you to go fetch an animal trailer.” -

Danny watched as his father return from the castle and walked back to Danny’s mother across the garden. The teen lifted an eyebrow in alarm as he figured his father had been crying.

He smiled like the brave man he was, but the red eyes and puffy bags under them spoke for themselves. Maddie acted as nothing and Arianna, who was sitting next to her by the garden table, choose not to comment either.

Danny wondered if he should ask his father of an explanation, but if the man had come from the castle, it was easy to guess who had made him cry.

Vlad.

Danny felt the old annoyance return. He knew the man still had his grudge with his father, but did he really have to be such a jerk about it? Yes, his father had sapped him and made him an halfa, but it had been an accident and totally not on purpose.

Keeping a grudge against him would be the same as if Danny started hate Sam for asking him to check out the portal those years ago. It had been an accident, no big deal. See? Danny could be a grownup about it, what was the Fruitloop’s excuse?

Danny’s dark though was distracted as his parents called Valerie to them. The huntress had been relaxing with Dani down on a blanked a little from the others, just enjoying the sun and get some vacation before she had to return to her summer job.

She lifted her sunglasses with a questioned face and Dani hovered curious above her, as Valerie walked to the garden table.

“Valerie, hon,” his mother greeted with a smile and patted on the chair next to her, “me and Jack was just talking about you.”

“Okay?” Valerie asked a little confused at took the seat.

Arianna took her floating daughter to join the teen’s football game, while the Fenton’s talked. Dani wasn’t much for follow, but did as her mother told her to with a pout. Danny acted as if he wanted to play backfield to get closer to the table and used his super hearing to listed in.

“I still can’t believe you’re the red huntress, all Danny’s friends seem to be ghost hunters these days,” Jack laughed goodhearted and Maddie served a cup of tea for the young girl.

“Yes, Danny always said he didn’t felt like following our footsteps, but now it seems that he has been doing just that all along. In secrets, at least,” Maddie smiled tiredly by her son’s silliness and tried to sound as understanding as possible, “but I’m afraid Danny won’t be able to continue protecting Amity Park when he goes to college and neither will Sam or Tucker. It just doesn’t seem like they want to do this as a life-time employment. Which is a shame, since me and Jack here need someone to continue our work when we retire.”

Valerie had listed and frowned a little confused, “alright, but I still don’t get what –”

“You’re a great ghost hunter,” Jack interrupted excited and made the girl blush, “we have seen you in the field and even fought for the rights to ghost against you. You got talent, kid.”

“We like you to come working with us,” Maddie finished for her husband, “I can understand that you don’t have the money for college, but as PhD scientists, we could educate you and offer you a paid internship in Fenton Works and future job. Now that Danny leaves Amity along with his friends, the town will need all the hunters it can get, and we might be the greats ghost experts in the world, but not even we can take this many ghost threats by ourselves. And as said, we are looking for a successor.”

“What do you say?” Jack asked and smiled along with his wife.

Valerie had lifted her cup, but all forgotten about it. She blinked like an owl, surprised by the sudden change the conversation had taken.

She was still blushing from all that praise and had a hard time collecting her own confident self.

“I…wow, I’m horned. Paid internship, you said? Wow.”

Danny could only smile as she took the offer and moved back to the football game. He turned intangible with a yelp as the ball suddenly came flying with his face as goal and heard the ball get caught behind him.

“That’s heartily how you play the game, my boy. Good thing you weren’t depending on a sports scholarship to get into college.”

“Funny,” Danny snorted and turned to Vlad, “I thought you didn’t have any moves or was that just something you told my father to get him to cry too?” Danny accusations didn’t seem to deter the man one bit. Actually, his smirk just grew. He looked utter smock about himself and handed Danny the oval ball without a care.

“Give that a second, Daniel. I’m about to make your father cry again, but from different reasons.”

Danny didn’t like that, “Vlad, if you’re going to hurt him I swear. –”

“Don’t get to hasty with the threats, my boy, I have simple brought your father a gift I’m sure will bring him to worship me on a level that will make his former glorification of me look like simple thankfulness.”

Danny followed the man’s long steps with a scowl, “you can’t buy my father’s friendship with money, Fruitloop. Money isn’t the solution for everything and what just happened up there? Why was he crying in the first place?”

Vlad send him a glace that was the epitome of Plasmius after a succeeded plot.

“He asked for my forgiveness.”

Danny lost his jaw and had to let Vlad push it back with a chuckle, “don’t look like that, badger, it doesn’t become you. Is it really that surprising to hear you father could admit his errors against me?”

“Yes!” Danny screeched, “he likes…never apologies for anything. How did you even…? What!?”

Vlad simple smirked by the teen’s troubles and hid well that he had suffered under similar agonies just a little while ago. They walked the last path until they got to the garden table and Maddie caught the sight of Vlad with a little frown.

Just like Danny, she had her suspensions of why her husband had been shedding tears. The other had been following them as well, curious to why Vlad had suddenly chosen to grace them with his presence.

“Vlad,” Maddie greeted coolly.

“Maddie,” Vlad returned just as condescending and focused his eye on Jack, who was cowering a bit under the man’s eyes.

“No fight!” Arianna hurried to exclaimed and send both Maddie and Vlad a look of warning.

“Oh, don’t worry, dear, it won’t come to that, I can assure you. Now, Jack.”

Jack looked up slowly, worried that Vlad might hadn’t taking his apologies as well as he had hoped. Vlad killed all his worries by putting up a smile.

“You’re forgiven.”

If Jack had been an inflatable beach toy empty of air, he would have been pumped on the second by those words. The big man jumped from his seat and grabbed Vlad for a bearhug with the largest grin Danny ever had witnessed.

“Thank you, Vlad! Oh Thank you, buddy!”

Vlad looked as if we were gonna die from suffocation or at least on broken rib and phased out of the man’s death grip. He huffed and straighter his hair and suit with a small scowl.

“Yes, yes, I know. It’s very indulged of me. You will of course have to

prove yourself to stay true to it in the future."

"Whatever you say, V-man!"

Vlad was going to point out the nickname as a violation of his forgiveness, but caught the sight of the spectator's scowls. Arianna just shrugged with a grin, as everyone else had crossed their arms and send him a look that spoke volumes.

Vlad hid his irritations and cleared his throat.

"And as a sign of my goodwill, I have brought you something, Jack."

Jack, who was still danced on his skies of happiness, suddenly returned to earth with a surprised face.

"For me?" he asked, as if the idea of receiving something from his old college buddy after their talk upstairs, was utter scandalous, "but…"

"I'm sure it's to your likening, you always babbled about getting one for who know how many years, like an annoying child. You're going to love it, I'm sure."

Danny and the others followed along as an unpleased following of spectators to get to the front of the castle. Danny lifted an eyebrow as a trailer behind a pickup turned up in the middle of the maintain driveway.

Vlad led Jack to the large container and made a gesture to the driver to release its contents with a wave.

"I don't understand, Vladdy," Jack began a little worried, but Vlad simple patted his broad shoulder and the smile of an honest philanthrope.

"Oh you will, you will."

Maddie's eyes widened as she suddenly understood and hid her face with a groan, "oh no. He's never going to stop talking about it now."

With light clip-clops down the trailers ramp, the smallest pony Danny had ever seen in his life, walked down to greet them.

The small animal neighed cheerily and shook with it little head. Its mane had even been braided with orange flowers and ribbons, and just to top the cake, a blanked with Jack's face had been thrown over its fat white back.

The little pony jumped on the spot like a happy puppy and the cuteness was enough to even kill Sam, who couldn't even get herself to comment on the gift.

Jack seemed to have stopped working all completely and could only stare at the pony with childish awe. The man suddenly exploded in glee and pulled the animal in for a hug.

Danny was still out of words, as Vlad bowed down to his ears, "turns out money can buy you anything, Daniel, even your fathers internal gratitude."

Danny lost it with a deadpan, "he has been talking about being deprived of a pony in his childhood for as long as I can remember. He's going to be in your debt for the rest of his life now."

Vlad could only grin as the shark that spotted his next easy meal, "I know."

Daisy and the rest of the servants set up more tables and chairs back at the garden, as Maddie convinced Jack to give the pony back to its trainer and allow it to get installed in the stable behind the castle.

Vlad had tried to hide his laugh as he had offered Jack a home for the pony, since Fenton works would prove to be a difficult place to keep an animal that size and Maddie hadn't been late to catch the subtle hint.

That she and Jack would have to come here more often in order to see it.

Jack had been lost to his surrounding, completely engulfed in stories of his whish of a pony as a child, and all the things he had always wanted to do in company of one and what was he going to name it?

He kept babbling about the anti-ghost installments he would he to build for it and mentioned a pony hazmat suit he had been hiding in

the closet all these years.

Maddie already looked sick as he started to speculate in all the weapons that could be designed to the pony's needs and how he was going to bring it along when they when out for ghost hunting.

Vlad was having a field day and Danny could hardly blame him. Stupid smock Fruitloop.

At least his father would get something else to talk about than making puns about Danny's condition as half-ghost now. He had gotten tired of the many jokes already a day after their return from the Ghost Zone.

You could only stomach puns like "Danny, look alive!", "you need to lift your spirit, son!", "don't look so dead inside, Danny!" and more to follow for a slight amount of hours, before you felt the need to shoot your own brain out.

His father was so far into his own pony talk, that not even the Dairy Kings sudden appearance at the table, could wake him up from his pony dreams. The little ghost chuckled by Maddie's staring,

"Well gosh and dolly, Mrs. Don't look that spook, I'm simple here for the cheese! It's the best in all Wisconsin, dontcha know?"

Maddie had to get control of her trigger finger, as more ghosts began to work around her to serve food by the table and she stiffed as three ghost vultures took a seat right next to her.

"I know those ghost birds," she mumbled to herself and the leader gave her an offended look.

"Hey! Don't threat us under yer breath, lady. Ve prefer the term "Ecto-Americans", anyvay!"

Daisy started to serve Arianna, Dani and Vlad the infamous green smoothie and she was about to carry the rest back to the castle, when Danny suddenly offered her his glass. He made a toast to Vlad with a small smile, that caught the man by surprise.

Dani and Arianna grinned, glad he'd finally joined the club after

having refused for so long. Vlad chuckled and tussled Danny's hair, and Danny let him without a word.

Vlad might be a fruitloop, but a fruitloop Danny was glad to know.

Daisy was surprised when Tucker and Sam offered their glasses as well. Before the maid knew, everyone at the table wanted a fill-up and she duplicated to get to everyone.

Sam sniffed the content of her green smoothie and looked doubtful for a second, "hey is it organic?"

The gardener Vic, send her an offended look over the rim of his small black glasses, "gurl, everything here is organic. Now drink my art."

Arianna watched the consumption of the green smoothie and remembered how unlikely this would have been just a few weeks ago. She hummed a little awestricken.

"Who would have guessed? It actually ended up with a barbeque party in the garden. America sure is a magical place."

Dani send her a confused look, "wut?"

Arianna just patted her head and turned to Danny as she rose as to make a speech, "as the host of this garden party and now barbeque party, I like to say just how glad I am that there isn't any secrets between us anymore, well I don't know about you, but I'm tired of going around with wigs and aliases."

The all chuckled by that and she pointed to Danny.

"'cause there isn't any secrets left, is there, Danny?" she smirked, watching as the teen began to sweat a little, "no life threatening information we all should know about, right?"

Danny could recall a lot of things fallen into that category, but hoped that it wouldn't come to that and just shrugged as convincing as he could, "yeah, no. No secrets between us anymore."

"*Lies,*" she replied and towered over him, "there's still one essential thing you need to revile to me, Danny Fenton."

Danny gulped, suddenly a little frightful, “and that is?”

She grabbed the surprised Vlad beside her and pointed to him, just the whole him.

“What does this man have in comment with a sugary morning cereal brand? Why is he a fruitloop!? I don’t understand!”

Chapter 40

“Do I have to repeat myself? The halfa’s conquest of Soul City had no influence from my side.”

Clockwork scowled by the none convinced looks the Observants send him and the overwhelming need to roll his eyes returned for the third time since their visited, but he stayed in role. Remained calm and collected, before speaking again.

“Neither the PDA, note or thermos besides the Foley human is a prove that I had a hand in the matter – your accusations are based on speculations and falsehood.”

“Don’t test us, Timekeeper,” the leader Observant scowled in a manner the ghost supposed was meant to be threatening, but the keeper didn’t catch the bait. He stayed his ground and his claim of innocence.

“Taking your anger out on me is not a solution. I can assure you,” he scoffed and turned his back on them.

Already tired of their presence and wishing they would leave again. Or even better, experienced a horrible death.

“The all-knowing eye is losing his patience with you, Clockwork,” the Observant insisted, “it would be wise to confess now and ask for forgiveness, rather than continue this game of rebellion. The all-knowing eye don’t need proves to punish you for these tedious actions. You know its power.”

“And it knows mine,” clockwork added relentlessly, “do I have to remind you that time is ever changing and swiftly in its creation? Just like the eye, I only see possibilities of the future and can hope for a course of action that will lead to the most befitting. If time could be controlled and bend by the eye’s wishes, you wouldn’t need me to maintain it, now would you?”

The Observants didn’t let themselves get persuaded by his silver tongue and the leader raised a warning finger.

“That doesn’t change that fact that you altered the result of the fight. The halfas would have been enslaved and scattered as it was meant if it hadn’t been for your interfering.”

Clockwork smirked with his back to them, “maybe, maybe not. I guess a trial would have to settle that now, wouldn’t that? But that would mean you would have to find a replacement for me during that ordeal and afterwards, should I get condemned. Not a nice image, now is it?”

The Observant seethed much to his glee.

“You’re not irreplaceable, Timekeeper,” one of them threated darkly, “you may be one of the last ancient, but others can be granted the power of time and replace you. Don’t test the all-knowing eye and his power.”

The ghost scoffed, not impressed. Such armatures, if they wanted to scare him, they had a lot to learn – he should know, he had existed alone for the screams of terror.

The ghost gritted his teeth, knowing very well the powers of time could be taken from the ghost as long as he was under their powers. That’s why Clockwork had started to train Dan as a novice, should anything happen to him.

A wicked smirk very unlike the timekeeper stretched across the ghost’s face and allowed teeth to peaked out.

The things he could do to them. The pain he could inflict them…the screams he could force out of them. He felt his hand flare. Such beautiful pictures….

The timekeeper’s signature scowl and peaceful hands turned back to the group of Observants and met their stubborn eyeball with his own unmoving red.

“Maybe. But let us allow the all-knowing eye to decide that. Anything else? I am kind of busy following the halfa on your orders.”

“We know Dark Phantom has been leaving your tower.”

The ghost didn't like the sound of that, but had prepared for it nevertheless. The game was over and the Observants was alerted. Well, time to "defend" himself it seemed.

"He escaped from me, yes," the ghost replied offhanded, "he got out of control and reached the edge of the Ghost Zone before I caught him and sealed him back into the thermos."

The timekeeper lifted his hand and summoned the old dented thermos. He handed it to the Observant and they examined the container with caution. One of them shook it and the growl of Dark Phantom reached their nonexciting ears a second later.

"Very well," the Observant with the container stated and hid the thermos away in his robes, "you will get it back when the halfa situation is back under control. Until then, Dark Phantom will be under our control."

Clockwork just nodded, that was what he had expected anyway. No surprise there.

He lifted his hand to activate one of the screens for all to see Danny Phantom flying around the Ghost Zone with a searching expression.

"And speaking of the halfas," Clockwork continued and smirked, "here is my second subject. Still not evil and soon reaching his twenty's, as you can see. He will soon outgrow his evil timeline and be out of our hands as I promised – satisfied?"

They weren't, but left him anyway. The ghost waiter for them to have left his tower and signature reach all together, before a laughter left his grinning mouth.

He returned to the screen showing Danny's way deeper into the zone and pulled out the medallion from under his purple cloak. The white healing stone of Titania shone in the tower's gloomy light and fueled the disguised Dan Phantom's laughter even more.

He caressed his new face and smirked with Clockwork's features.

"Foolish Observants."

Same thought seemed to go through the featured Danny Phantom's head as his eyes shone red for a second before he continued his merry road.

Clockwork felt strange in Dan's body and even more so transformed to look like the young Danny at the same time, but it wouldn't be for long. As soon as he had finished his deed, he and Dan would switch back their bodies and could celebrate.

Helping the halfas and humans to escape Soul City and the Observants whish of separation had been risky, but if would get down to an arrest, Dan had wanted to be the one to be caught.

Having more experience with imprisonment and fights against other ghosts than most.

Not that Clockwork couldn't defend himself, but his enslavement and invisible chains had made it impossible for him to lift a finger against the Observants and would have proved him useless should they arrest him.

Anyhow, they would need Dan to be the one to stay back at the tower in order to keep up retain his duplicate in the thermos, since the task at hand would need powers not even Dan was in possession of.

The disguised Clockwork landed before the great ghost lair and took a second to behold Pariah Dark's castle. It was just as ominous as the time he had sealed the ghost king away along with his fellow ancients and the place held some memories.

The crown of fire and ring of rage now rested securely in his tower thanks to Dan, but that didn't make the old king less a threat.

And the perfect object for Clockwork's further plans.

He hovered his way through the empty castle and soon arrived at the throne room. The tall coffin stood where Danny had sealed it and Clockwork flew closer to inspect the little crack near the opening.

It wasn't much, but it had caused great amount of power to create such a crack in a coffin made by the hands of ancient ghost material.

Pariah must have put all his will behind to try and keep the coffin from closing on him back at the fight with the ghost-boy.

Clockwork smirked and press his hands to the crack, called the old powers to him to bend the coffin's material as he wished. Dark light filled the small cracks and started to expand them. Making them wider and deeper.

The old ghost behind the young Phantom's face smirked sardonic as the coffin's content started to move in its sleep. Pariah was beginning to wake from his slumber.

Perfect.

"Your presence is need once again, old king," Clockwork whispered, "your crown and ring is waiting for its new king to claim it and the throne to be seated. The Ghost Zone demands its ruler and the next reign can begin. The time of change has begun and the prophesies are at stake. It's time you play your part and follow the destiny of time."

He left the coffin, well knowing that its lock was merely weeks from breaking and releasing its horror and returned to the tower. He looked forward to seeing Dan again and hoped that the talk with the Observants had run smoothly.

An arrest would set back their planes, but only a bit.

He decided he was going to teach Dan some of his more difficult time powers tonight.

Dan was a fast learner and eager to get power. It would prove to be a necessary to teach Dan his power, should his planes fail – well, that and the simple interest in seeing how much Dan was willing to learn from him.

Watching the former destroyer work to create something with hands that had previously been tainted with blood, was oddly fascinating. The old timekeeper looked forward to getting his own body back as well, but guesses he could let Dan have his fun for a little while longer.

He seemed to like watching himself and who knew…maybe it would

be fun to take Dan like this. A few ideas of what they could do like this popped up in the old timekeeper's head and he chuckled lowly.

They had time before the ghost king woke up.

Author's Note:

I will post a new chapter every friday